DATTATREYA TRADITION
(DATTA-PARAMPARA)

VOLUME II: AVATARS OF DATTATREYA

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DATTATREYA TRADITION (*DATTA-PARAMPARA*) VOL II of Three Volumes

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PREFACE

More than a decade ago, from July 1997 to October 1999 I had published a ten part series titled DATTA-PARAMPARA in the magazine SAI - ARPAN, a quarterly publication of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba Spiritual and Charitable Trust Mumbai, at the request of its President Dr Amiya Kumar Sahu. The series covered information on Shri Dattatreya, biographies of his four avatars Shipad Shrivallabh, Shri Narasimha Saraswati, Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and Shri Manik Prabhu. In the later part of the series short biographies of some famous disciples of Shri Swami Samarth and of some famous Dattatreya Devotees were also included.

While writing the articles I was intrigued by many issues like when Dattatreya was born and what was the name of the Atri rishi who was Dattatreya's father. It struck me much later that in the Puranas as well as in the Epics whenever rishis were mentioned in the narrative of events they ere mentioned only by their generic family names such as Atri and Vasishta without specifying the actual personal name of the individual irrespective of the era in which the event occurred. This gave an appearance as if the particular rishi, if not immortal, lived throughout the centuries. Thus Atri is mentioned as one of the *saptarshis*, (the seven mind-sons of Brahma the creator) who marries Anasuya the daughter of Kardama rishi (or of Daksha according to some other Puranas) and is mentioned in connection with the activities of various kings in different generations that followed right upto the time of Rama in the Ramayana. I also subsequently realized that the so called *saparshis* were not contemporaries but lived in different time periods. Bunching them together as *Saptarshi* group was more of the typical Puranic symbolism than reality. This fact however has been traditionally glossed overby everybody whether he is a pious reader with tendency to believe everything in the "holy" text put before him or a discriminating scholar with capacity to discern fact from fiction. For example Dr P. N. Joshi in his monumental work "Dattatreya Dnyankosha" extols the qualities of Dattatreya's father Rishi Atri but what he actually does is list the qualities mentioned in the ancient texts against "rishi Atri" without considering the fact that these qualities did not belong to a single individual but different individuals who lived in different ages. He even mentions Shubhatreyi as a daughter of Atri not mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya. This was confusing until I came across the work of Shrikant Talageri (**The Rigveda- A Historical Analysis**) in which he lists the names of 37 different rishis of Atri lineage who have composed hymns in the Rigveda, but none of whom could be Dattatreya's father. I used to think mistakenly for some time that the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the birth legends of Dattatreya were the same as the Atri and Anasuya mentioned in the Ramayana ans was puzzled because Ramayana does not mention any children to this Atri couple and definitely not Dattatreya. But in the course of further reading my misconception vanished and was replaced by the questions: "What was the personal name of the Atri rishi who was Dattarteya's father and anasuya's husband?, "When did he live?

Analysing the problem, it was clear that what was needed was a chronological scale for locating the various Atris on a time-line and look for the plausible parents of Dattatreya. I had to turn to the works of the scholars in ancient literature. Fortunately I came across some works on the ancient Indian History, especially the following: (i) *Early Hindu India – A Dynastic Study* by A. Muzumdar in which the author has given a chronology and has tried to interpret the Puranic events in historical terms, (ii) the scholarly works of Mr M. R. Yardi (See Bibliography) on the present structure of Ramayana and Mahabharata in which he has shown how the original texts by Valmiki and Vyasa were corrupted by Romaharshan Suta, his son Sauti (fifth century BC), Harivanshakara (second century BC) and others who inserted chronologically absurd stories of their own imagination e.g. about Rama's meeting Vishwamitra and Parshurama both of whom lived several centuries earlier to him; (iii) the scholarly works of Dr P. L. Bhargava (*Retrieval of History from Puranic Myths*, *Vedic Religion and Culture* and *India in the Vedic Age*). Chronology of kings of the Aryan dynasties was obviously necessary to arrive at a solution to my doubts. This made me look to the chronology of events mentioned in the Puranas and the epics. Following the lead given by Muzumdar I attempted first to work out a chronology with the help of the genealogies of kings given in Bhagwat Purana. When the names of the kings of the so-called Solar and Lunar dynasty kings were sequentially listed

from Vaivaswat Manu onwards the results were found to be ridiculous. This tabulation showed Ramas's time as later than Krishna's and Yudhishtira was shown as not a contemporary of Krishna. Obviously the genealogies given in the Bhagwat Purana were corrupted. Finally the last mentioned work of Dr P. L. Bhargava (*India in the Vedic Age*) answered many of my doubts. Having found the anomalies Bhargava corrected for and explained the anomalies using the contemporous events mentioned in the various Vedic texts. Using the corrected dynasty list tables from Vaivaswat Manu onwards and using 1100 BC as the date of Mahabharata war suggestd by him it was possible to create a chronological table of kings and rishis assuming an average period of a kings reign. Different people have used different regnal periods from about 18 to 25 years. Bhargava suggests it to be 20 years. Therefore I made a chronological table with this value of regnal period.

Two questions then remained: (i) Which Atri was Dattateya's father who was also the father of Soma and Durvasa and whose wife was named Anasuya? (ii) Dattatreya is said to have had six disciples: Prahlada, Ayu, Yadu, Kartavirya Sahasrarjuna, king Alarka and Parashurama. It was necessary that times of these disciples match those of the Atri who was Dattatreya's father. Where the six disciples contemporary?

Literature search showed the following points: (i) None of the 37 Atris mentioned by Talageri were associated with Dattatreya. (ii) Only Ramayana Atri's wife was named Anasuya. (iii) The story of Kardama Muni's daughter Anasuya having married Atri as given in Bhagwat and some other Puranas is imaginary because Atri according to this story was one of the Saptarshis and the story of Saptarshi is a Puranic myth since the Rishis listed therein were not contemporary but lived in different ages. Also, Atri (and names of other rishis like Vasishtha, Bhrigu etc.) used in the Puranas are generic names or Gotra names and not individual rishi names. (iv) The six disciples can be divided into two groups: Prahlada, Ayu and Yadu who lived around Vaivaswat Manu's time while Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama who lived six centuries later.

A careful scrutiny of Bhagwat Purana which gives the stories of the encounters of Prahlada and Yadu with Dattatreya showed that they had met an *Avadhuta* which some translators conveniently interpreted to be Dattatreya though without any basis. As regards Ayu the story seems to have been taken from another context that showed Dattatreya's Tantric connection and is given differently in the Markandeya Purana. It was clear that Dattatreya could not have been the Guru of Prahlada, Yadu and Ayu and hence Dattatreya could not have been born in Manu's time.

Next, when stories of the births of Soma and Durvasa given in the Mahabharata and Puranas were scrutinized it was noted that Atri's son Soma was born as a result of shedding of the immense effulgence gained by Atri after a severe penance. It does not mention his mother at all nor does it mention Durvasa. Also Soma lived around Vaivaswat Manu time because Soma's son Budha was married to Manu's daughter Ila. As regards Durvasa he was born according to Mahabharata as an avatar of Shiva but in a yajna performed after the sons of Tripurasura were killed. He has absolutely no connection with Atri. This established that the Puranas by taking stories from different contexts and different times have synthesized the mythical legend of Dattatreya's birth. They have also used the name of Anasuya, wife of Ramayana Atri in the myth. But the pious devotees have accepted this myth and the image of Dattatreya in their minds is that of a Trimurti (in present times depicted by a three-head-six arm image) who is a celibate wandering yogi wandering over the earth to grace his devotees. However, Dattatreya's being a celibate is also in doubt because according to Mahabharata Dattatreya was a sage belonging to Atri lineage (not Atri Rishi's son) who was a householder and had a son named Nimi and a beautiful grandson named Shriman whose death had caused Nimi a great sorrow.

Coming to question of the time of Dattatreya's birth, it became clear that the only way to zoom in to this date would be through the time of his later disciples namely: Sahasrarjuna, Alarka and Parashurama. According to the earlier mentioned chronology developed by Bhargava this came to be about mid-25th century BC.

That the real historical image of Dattatreya contradicted the Puranic image must have been glaringly obvious to many historians but it is not clear why no one had pointed it out. But even after having found it to be so I was hesitant to make these findings public lest I hurt the feelings of the pious devotees.

However on further thinking I realized that the pious believe many things which are illogical and historically unacceptable and they are not really bothered about facts but to the devotion of a deity fixed in their minds. I recalled reading that the character of Radha, Krishna's consort from Gokul whose devotional love for Krishna is legendary and has been the subject of innumerable amorous as well as devotional songs (*Bhajans*) is according to scholars an imaginary character. She is not mentioned in Mahabharata, or in Harivansha or in the Bhagwat Purana. But Radha-Krishna is a highly popular pair of deities worshipped by millions not only in India but abroad as well, and is the main deity of ISKON sect. Meerabai, Chainatnya Mahaprabhu, Narasi Mehta and many other saints reached a high spiritual level through their worship and have composed many devotional songs describing the devotional love between Radha and Krishna. Thus it is not necesary that the idol of worship or the object of devotion be real and historical and a devotee does not reall bother about such things.

I came across an interesting statement in the biography of the great spiritualist philosopher scholar Gopinath Kaviraj (1887 – 1976) which confirmed this view. The biography mentions the opinion of the then well-known Brahmo Samjist thinker who remarked in the context of vision of Shri Krishna which Aurobindo had while in prison, that "**Whether Shri Krishna was real or not had nothing to do with the vision because it is quite possible that Historic Krishna and Krishna as a principle can exist independent of each other. One would experience according to one's feelings on the subject. Examples of these can be found in all religions including the Christian. Every saint cannot be a liar. The object of your devotion will make Itself appear according to how you imagine It to be**." Thus, a pious person will stick to his beliefs whatever may be evident intellectually. This gave me the impetus to write (in Part II) about issues like the concept of an avatar which the pious believe intrinsically and quote Bhagvad Gita which says that Bhagwan takes an avatar in different yugas to punish the evil, to save the saints and establish Dharma or the righteous way of life. The pious of course do not ask why there were no avatars to counter the atrocities of Hitler and the communist dictators or for that matter the present terrorism. No doubt these worldly issues and the spiritual domain are mutually exclusive.

The original Datta-parampara series did not give details of Dattatreya's advice to the disciples. I have included it in this book and summarized the advice to Parashurama given in the Tripura Rahasya even though it is somewhat removed from the spiritual practice of present day devotees.

After finalizing the first volume I gave a printed copy to my good friend and neighbor Mr. Gangadhar Gangathade I am grateful to him for pointing out some errors like the birthdates of Krishna and Yudhishtira which I have since corrected.

This work is currently available at the URL: www.vvshirvaikar.de which belongs to my good friend Mr. Dietrich Platthaus of Essen Germany. His help in putting it on internet and his critical comments have been invaluable.

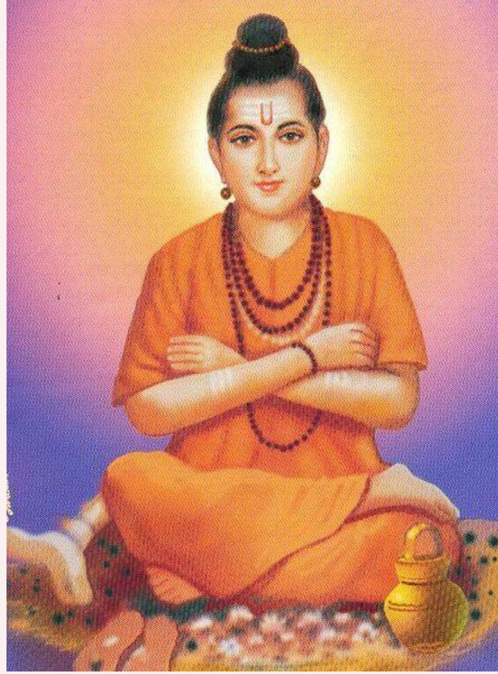
I offer this at the feet of my guru Shri Shankar Maharaj without whose grace this work would not have been possible.

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PART I

FIRST AVATAR: SHRIPAD SHRIVALLABH



Shripad Shrivallabha

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Our main and really speaking, the only source of information about Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasimha Saraswati the first two avatars of Shri Dattatreya is the famous book Gurucharitra. Gurucharitra is a holy book in the Dattatreya Tradition and a spiritually powerful composition in Marathi verse by Saraswati Gangadhar on the life and teachings of the two avatars.. Saraswati Gangadhar was the great-great-grandson of Sayandeo one of the householder disciples of Shri Narasimha Saraswati. He wrote the book about a century after Shri Narasimha Saraswati's *Samadhi* in 1458 AD. The book extols Guru-worship through a number of stories in their lives.

Recently, a book on the life of Shripad Shrivallabh has been published. It purportedly gives details of his early life at Pithapur. However it is full of miracles and unbelievable tales involving him and his grandfather Bapanna but has little value from historical considerations.

2.0 BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Shripad Shrivallabh was born in 1320 AD in a Brahmin family at Pithapur (Pithapuram) in Andhra Pradesh. It is now in the Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. It is located on Hyderabad-Vishakhapattanam railway line and is about 10–12 km from Samalkot junction.

In Pithapur there used to live a Brahmin by the name Appalaraju Sarma belonging to the *Apastambha* branch. His wife Sumati was a *pativrata* (i.e. chaste lady who worships and obeys her husband). On one

Amavasya day (day when there is no moon) a *Shraddha* ritual (annual offering to ancestors) was being performed in the house when Shri Dattatreya came in the disguise of a mendicant sanyasi. Though it is customary to feed the Brahmins invited for the ritual before anybody else eats in the house, Sumati gave alms to Shri Dattatreya who was very pleased and showed her his subtle form of the Trinity. Sumati rushed to him and fell at his feet and offered sincere obeisance. Dattatreya said to her, "Oh mother, ask whatever you desire and you will get it." Sumati praised him and said that since he had addressed her as mother let it turn out to be true. She said that she had conceived many sons but only two had survived and those too were useless because they were lame and blind. She prayed that she should have a son who was a sage like him. Dattatreya gave her the boon with the condition that she should always listen to her son and vanished, leaving the woman wondering. She told this unusual happening to her husband who was happy with the realization that Shri Dattatreya himself had come and would take birth as his son. Sumati begged pardon for giving alms before the Brahmins were served, but her husband said that they were fortunate to have had a chance to feed Shri Dattatreya, an act by which the forefathers would be content.

Very soon Sumati was pregnant and in due time gave birth to a son. Though not mentioned n Gurucharitra, his birthday is celebrated on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada, the sixth month according to the Hindu calendar. It is also the day of Ganesh Chaturthi, the birthday of Ganapati. His horoscope predicted that the boy would become a great *Tapaswi* (a sage performing penance) who would be a teacher to the world and capable of initiation of disciples. He was named "Shripad", because Dattatreya himself had taken avatar in the form of the boy in order to benefit devotees.

When the boy was seven years old the Brahmin performed his thread ceremony. The boy studied Vedas and became expert in *Mimansa*, *Tarka* (logic) and other Shastras. The boy used to advice about the code of personal and public behaviour and about the atonements for different types of sins to all. He gave discourses on the various commentaries on Vedanta to the Brahmins.

Leaves home on pilgrimage When the boy was sixteen his parents began contemplating his marriage but he refused and said that he is a detached person, a celibate (*Brahmachari*) and wishes to go north to do penance and practice yoga. Remembering the instructions of Shri Dattatreya his father had to let him go. But he also lamented about his hopes that he would be their support in old age since his elder brothers were infirm. Both mother and father wept with grief and fell unconscious. Shripad brought them back to senses, looked benevolently at his two brothers who, with his power, instantly became free of their infirmities and received the knowledge of Vedas, Shastras etc. After instructing the two brothers to take care of the parents and accepting their obeisance, Shripad Shrivallabh left for Varanasi. From there he went to Badarikashram and then to Gokarna Mahabaleshwar on the west coast in Karnataka, the place where the Shivalinga given to Ravana by Shiva himself is embedded. After staying there for three years Shripad Shrivallabh went to Shri Shailam where he stayed for four months and then came to Kuravapur on the banks of river Krishna.

It is notable that Shripad Shrivallabh did not become a Sanyasi but lived like an *avadhuta* (ascetic).

Gurucharitra states that in this Kali age (Kaliyuga) persons born in Brahmin families forgot their prescribed code of conduct and lived a life improper to Brahmins. This avatar was to save the religion by reviving the code of conduct and to protect the devotees.

FOUNDATION FOR THE NEXT AVATAR

Boon to Ambica At Kuravapur the foundation for the next avatar was laid. It happened like this.

There was a widow named Ambica whose son was a very dull boy though his late father was a learned person. He forgot immediately whatever he learnt. The father had died broken-hearted due to his son's dullness. All neighbours used to tease and taunt the boy. The mother and son had to resort to begging for livelihood. Fed up with that kind of life both decided to commit suicide by drowning in the river. When

they came to the river they saw Shripad Shrivallabh taking his bath. They went to him and told him of their decision requesting that they should not be stained by the sin of suicide. Shripad Shrivallabh felt compassion for them and told them to observe a *vrata* (a routine with austerity) called *Shanipradosha* which involves worship of Shiva so that she would get a good son like himself at least in the next birth. With his benevolent hands he blessed the boy who became instantly intelligent and learned. Ambica and her son left and spent their life as instructed. In the course of time Ambica died; she was reborn at Karanja as Ambabhavani and became the mother of the second avatar Shri Narasimha Saraswati about which we shall read later.

Boon to Washer-man While Shripad Shrivallabh was staying at Kuravapur on the banks of the Krishna River, he used to come to the river for the customary thrice daily bath. A washer man used to visit him daily to make his obeisance and prostrate before him. One day Shripad Shrivallabh casually remarked to him to go and reign as a king. The washer man kept these words in mind.

One day a Muslim king came to the river with his retinue for enjoying an outing with his well dressed and ornamented wives. The washer man felt jealous of the king and said to himself, "Which deity could this king have worshipped and which guru he must be having to be able to enjoy such wealth!" When the washer man visited that day Shripad Shrivallabh read his mind and told him that unless one satisfies one's desires the mind does not get cleansed of unfulfilled desires and that causes troubles in future births. Therefore he should take the next birth as a king in a Muslim dynasty. Shripad Shrivallabh further told him that he himself also would be reborn as Narasimha Saraswati and they would meet in the next birth.

SAMADHI

Shripad Shrivallabh took *Samadhi* at Kuravapur on twelfth day in the dark half of the month of Ashwin. It is celebrated now as Guru-Dwadashi. The year of *Samadhi* is given as 1350 AD but there is considerable uncertainty about the date as this makes his age at the time of *Samadhi* as only thirty years (Ref:P.N.Joshi p 46). Before taking *Samadhi* he promised his disciples of his continued presence at Kuravapur. This is evident from the next story.

APPEARANCE AFTER SAMADHI

Gurucharitra gives an instant of how even after Samadhi Shripad Shrivallabh helped one of his devotees, a Brahmin merchant by the name Vallabhesh. The latter was proceeding to Kuravapur with the intention of giving meals to Brahmins. Some thieves accompanied him as co-travellers to Kuravapur and killed him one night while he slept. But Shripad Shrivallabh rushed there with his yogic powers and with his trident killed all the thieves except one who pleaded for mercy, not having been part of the plot. Shripad Shrivallabh revived the devotee and vanished. In the morning the devotee woke up and found what had happened through the surviving co-traveller. Devotees report that they feel the presence of Shripad Shrivallabh at Kuravapur even today.

The above Vallabhesh is considered to be founder of the Hedgewar family in which Dr. K. B. Hedgewar who founded the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* belonged to the 9^{th} generation from Vallabhesh. A temple constructed according to his guidelines was constructed in Pithapuram and is being maintained by “Sripada Srivallbha Mahasansthanam”.

We see in Shripad Shrivallabh a great Sanyasi, dispassionate and compassionate. He does not stay away from people as many Sanyasis do but encounters people and graces them. There are some who assert that the Dattatreya avatar was to maintain the caste system. But this seems to be a prejudiced view of people who identify the Hindu way of life with caste system (*see also later Re Swami Samarth*). For, we see from the study of the activities of Shripad Shrivallabh as well as of the other avatars that they gave their grace to all irrespective of not only caste but of religion as well. This is the true picture of Shri Dattatreya who, for the past several millennia has graced and been a guru to countless persons of all castes and creeds.

ABOUT KURAVAPUR

Kuravapur is also known as Kuruvapur, Kurugadda or Gurudweepam. During Nizam days this was known as Kuruvalaya. Situated in the state of Karnataka in India it has become a famous place of lord Dattatreya on account of Shripad Shrivallabh.

It is an island in the Krishna River hence one can reach there only by a hired boat. The difficulties in reaching Kuravapur have not prevented devotees from visiting it in large numbers. Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembeswami) spent the Chaturmasa period (the four monsoon months)" here in the year of 1911. His disciples Shri Rangavadhuta and Gulavani Maharaj were also performed penance here. Important places at Kuravapur are: Striped Shrivallabh *paduka* mandir, a 1000-year old Vata-vriksha (banyan tree), the cave where the great Datta-devotee Shri Vasudevananda Saraswati performed penance and the Dattatreya temple at Sri Vithalbaba ashram.

Shripad Shrivallabh stayed here in his later life. The story of the Vallabhesh planning to feed about 1000 Brahmins shows that the village must have been quite big. Now (2006 AD) the population has reduced and there are many fields in between the temple and the village. The village is at one end of the island and the temple is at the other end.

How to reach Kuravapur: There are two routes to reach Kuravapur: via Raichur in Karnataka state and via Makthal in Andhra Pradesh state.

Raichur is about 12 hours train journey from Pune. At Raichur one can hire a bus/rickshaw towards a place called Atkur 40 km away. There is also a six times daily KSRTC bus service from Raichur to Atkur, most buses ending at the bank of Krishna. At Atkur one can hire a small elliptical boat called *theppa* or *butti* to cross the Krishna river and reach Kuravapura at a fee of about Rs 20/-.



Place of meditation of

Shripad Shrivallabh



Shripad Shrivallabh *padukas* at Kuruvapur

Makthal (Mahaboobnagar district, Andhra Pradesh) is 68 Km from Mahaboobnagar and 168 Km from Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Mahaboobnagar is also connected by rail route. One has to go by bus either from Mahaboobnagar or by Hyderabad-Raichur bus via Mahaboobnagar and get down at Makthal. One has to hire an auto or taxi (jeep) from Makthal to the river bank 17 Km away. There are two locations on the river bank where Butti or small boats can be hired. One is Panchdeo Pahad and another one is behind Vithal baba ashram (1Km from ashram). One can catch *theppa* to reach this island.

Lodging and boarding facilities are not available at Kuruvapur. It is recommended to reach in the morning hours and return in the evening by 5.00 p.m. Pilgrims should packed food and snacks etc. If at all want to stay at nights, the temple Priests will arrange food (with prior intimation after reaching there) for a fee and the pilgrims have to sleep in the premises of the mandir.

NOTE: The Government of Andhra Pradesh is going to construct “JOORALA PROJECT” which is only about 10 Km distance from Kuravapur. The people who are staying in the surrounding area are telling that the Kuravapur Kshetra will be submerged after the project is completed.

HIS ROLE AS AN AVATAR

Shripad Shrivallabh was born at a time when the region was being attacked by Muslims Unlike earlier invaders who ultimately became assimilated in the Hindu way of life these invaders did not stop at acquiring the kingdoms but began to forcibly convert people to the Muslim religion, destroy temples, idols and statues. The practice of the earlier Muslim invaders who invaded mostly the northern regions was, after conquering a kingdom, to put to death all fighting men and take others as slaves and sell them. Fortunately the Moghul invaders who wanted to rule and not merely loot, did not resort to this. Instead, persons experienced in administration and governance were inducted in the ruling of the conquered kingdoms. Majority of the Hindu population was spared from death and slavery but was subjected to Jizia tax customarily laid on non-Muslims. Majority of such people were of course Brahmins and the upper class whose daily routine now changed from the orthodox and adjusted to that of the new rulers. There was naturally a cultural mixing between the Hindu-Muslim communities.

The Hindu Muslim situation in the Maharashtra-Karnataka-Andhra is summarized by V.B. Kher in his book “Sai Baba – His Divine glimpses Ch 6, (See Bibliography).

The Muslim invasion of south started in 1296 when Allauddin Khilji invaded the Yadava kingdom of Devagiri, defeated Ramdeva. It was renamed as Daulatabad. After a lot of internal struggles the Khiljis and Tughlakhs were driven out and in 1347 Hasan became the king, naming himself Abdu-Muzaffar Allauddin Bahaman Shah and the kingdom was known as Bahamani kingdom. We see that even before Samadhi, Muslim rule was well entrenched in the region. The incidence of the washer-man watching wistfully the Muslim king’s picnic also indicates this.

In 1300 AD the Sufi saint of Delhi sent 700 Sufi saints belonging to different orders to Deccan. These saints settled in various parts of Deccan. The leader of this group Mutajabuddin Zarzari Zar Baksh settled on the outskirts of Daulatabad. After his death in 1309 his elder brother was sent by Nizam-ud-din Chishti with another band of Sufi saints, whose mission was to spread Islam in the Maharashtra-Karnataka region. Many disciples were attracted towards them and many but not all converted to Islam. Their influence stabilized Muslim rule in Maharashtra. Once this happened, conversion which was voluntary took an aggressive form. The *Dargas* and shrines established by these saints are still popular pilgrimage centres for both Hindus and Muslims.

Many Sufis became devotes of Shri Dattatreya. Dattatreya came to be known to the Muslims as Shah Faqir or Shahdatta Alam Prabhu and had many Muslim devotees. We see two centuries later the great Dattatreya devotee Janardanswami (b. 1504 AD) becoming the disciple of Chand Bodhale a Sufi of Kadaria sub-sect. Saint Eknath was Janardanswami’s disciple and both were given *darshan* by Dattatreya in the form of a Malang i.e. a Muslim fakir.

Sri Guru Datha Threya Baba Budangiri Dargah is said to be the oldest Sufi shrine in Chikmagaluru District, Karnataka. The available history says that one Dada Hayath, his real name being ‘Hazrat Shah Jamer Allah Mazarabi’, considered to be a direct disciple of the Prophet, was sent to India in 11th century from Saudi Arabia to spread the message of Islam and peace, in true tradition of Sufism. The historical records tell us that the shrine of Baba Budhan was patronized by both Hindu as well as Muslim kings, both of whom endowed it with large land grants. In edicts issued by the Hindu rulers of Mysore the shrine was referred

to as the Sri Dattatreya Swami Baba Budhan Peetha ('The Monastery of the Revered Lord Dattatreya Baba Budhan'), while the Muslim custodians of the shrine were granted the honorific title of *jagadguru* or 'Teachers of the World'. They were, in addition, the only Muslim religious heads to be exempted from personal appearance in the civil courts of the state. This shows the cultural exchange as well as the influence of Dattatreya in the Sufi sect. (*Ref* Baba Budangiri: Internet URL see Bibliography)

We shall speak more about Sufi aspect in the next part on the biography of the second avatar Shri Nara-simha Saraswati.

We see that while Shripad Shrivallabh did not move among people he was aware of the Muslim influence in its early stage and laid foundation for the second avatar that carried his work further.

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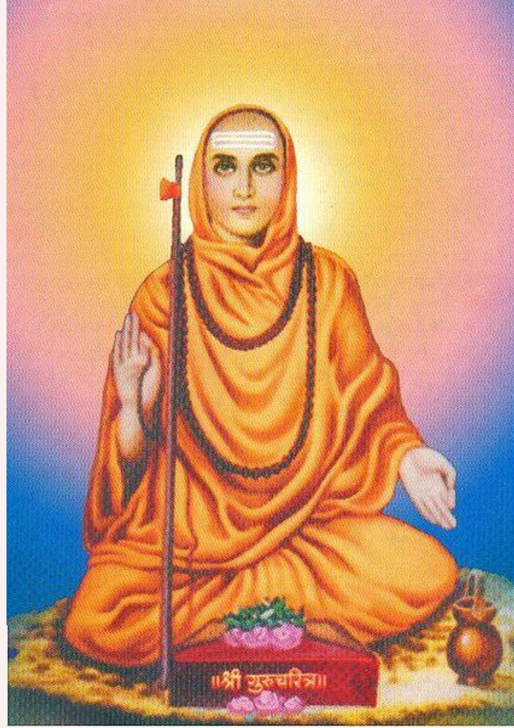
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PART II

SECOND AVATAR: SHRI NARASIMHA SARASWATI



SHRI NARASIMHA SARASWATI

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Shri Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1458 A.D.) was born at a place called Lad Karanja in Akola District in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Karanja station lies on the Murtijapur-Yavatamal section of the railway. This place was identified as Shri Narasimha Saraswati's birthplace by Shri Vasudevanand Saraswati (Tembeswami) during his visit. He felt the presence of Shri Narasimha Saraswati in one of the castles (Wada) there which was later confirmed by a vision. A temple called Gurumandir has been built there and is active in religious and social welfare activities in the North Maharashtra (Vidarbha) region in the past 70 years,

In Gurucharitra Saraswati Gangadhar has used the character of *Siddha* said to be a yogi disciple of Shri Narasimha Saraswati to narrate the life story of Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasimha Saraswati to an aspirant devotee Namadharak who is no other than Saraswati Gangadhar himself. (People who begot children by the grace of Shri Narasimha Saraswati used to name them after him. Namdharak means holder of the name of the Guru).

2.0 BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Ambica, the woman who had received the boon from Shripad Shrivallabh that she would beget a great son in the next birth, was reborn as Ambabhavani in a Brahmin family at Lad Karanja. She was given in marriage to Madhava, a Brahmin and a devotee of Shiva living in the same village. By the traits carried from earlier birth Ambabhavani continued her *Shanipradosha vrata*. In the course of time she gave birth to a son who instead of crying at birth uttered the sound *Aum*. Astrologers predicted that the boy would grow to be a great person, a celibate *sanyasi* and a Guru to the world. The boy was officially named Shaligramdeo but was called in practice by the name Narahari. Up to the age of seven the boy did not speak a word except *Aum*. The parents were worried about his future and how to perform the thread ceremony mandatory for Brahmin boys.

One day the boy communicated by signs that he would speak *after* the thread ceremony and brought a small iron cup which he had turned into gold by his touch. The parents realized that the boy was an avatar and had divine powers. They arranged his thread ceremony on a grand scale for which the entire village was invited. Everybody was wondering how the boy's father would teach *Gayatri Mantra* to the dumb boy. But after the father told him the Mantra in his ear and as part of the ritual, it was time to ask for alms from the mother, the boy surprised everybody by singing the first hymn from Rigveda in a clear voice. Then he sang hymns from Yajurveda and Samaveda also confirming that the boy was an avatar.

The boy begged to his parents that he should be allowed to go away on a pilgrimage. The parents were very sad hearing this and told him that they had hoped he would be their support in their old age. His mother also argued that “It is proper that a man must pass through the four stages of life namely, Childhood, Celibacy, family life and old age (to be spent in forests) and *sanyasa* should be adopted only after enjoying the family life.

Advice to mother On this the boy gave his mother a sound philosophical advice as follows: “This body is a temporary affair and passage of every day brings one nearer to his death. Like fish in a small pond which some day is going to become dry people live in a carefree manner not bothering about what would happen to them after death. Age eats away the lifespan therefore the wise should accumulate good *karmas* from young age itself. One must spend each day accumulating good *karmas*. Every day lost without them is a wasted day. The god of death Yama has no compassion therefore one must continue doing good actions. ”

To console her he gave a boon that she would beget three sons and also a daughter. Mother agreed to let him go on the condition that he should stay until the first son was born.

So Narahari remained at home and taught Vedas and *Shastras* to even older seekers of knowledge who wondered at this prodigy. His parents worshipped him as if he was a family deity. About nine months later his mother gave birth to beautiful twin boys. After the twins were three months old Narahari, then only eight years of age, left the home for going to Badri forest promising his parents they would get two more sons and a daughter. He promised to visit them thirty years later. Whole village accompanied his parents to bid goodbye to the young boy small aspirant. Before parting he reminded his mother of her earlier birth and gave her a vision of Shri Dattatreya and gave them assurance that whenever they remember him he would be there with them.

3.0 RENUNCIATION (*SANYASA*)

In Varanasi Before going to Badri forest Narahari went to Varanasi where he spent his time practicing yoga and meditation. People used to wonder at this small boy bathing in the Ganges at Manikarnika Ghat thrice daily and spending his time in yogic practices and austerities. One old *sanyasi* by name Krishna Saraswati, who had attained Self-realization, was attracted towards this boy and requested him to be initiated as a *sanyasi* (renunciate) so that he could be empowered later to initiate and guide other aspirants in the spiritual path. Krishna Saraswati was the thirteenth in the lineage of Adi Shankaracharya belonging

to Shringeri branch. Narahari was named Narasimha Saraswati after renunciation and becoming a sanyasi. He stayed for some time in Varanasi and became well-known for his teaching of the Vedas and Shastras to eager students.

To Badri From Varanasi Shri Narasimha Saraswati went north to Badri forest with his disciples. From there he came to the Ganges near Calcutta and travelling along the shores reached Prayag. There he initiated a very intelligent and devoted disciple called Madhava and named him Madhava Saraswati. He stayed in Prayag for some time and initiated many very good disciples out of which the main seven were Bal, Krishna, Upendra, Madhav, Sadanand, Dnyanjyoti, and the seventh was a siddha (a yogi with occult powers) who later met and narrated the stories about Shri Guru (as we shall call him now) to Saraswati Gangadhar, author of Gurucharitra.

4.0 WANDERINGS TOWARDS SOUTH

Visits parents From Prayag Shri Guru went towards south. After thirty years of wandering Shri Guru returned to his place of birth and met his family (his parents and his brothers and sister Ratnai) as promised. By now people fully realized that they were meeting an avatar of Shri Dattatreya. Everybody in the town invited him for alms. He did not refuse anybody and satisfied their desire by going to their homes at the same time taking many self-forms by his yogic powers. When his parents prayed that they should obtain liberation he explained that when a person adopts sanyasa his forty-two generations become liberated. He added that in final years they will live in Varanasi where death gives liberation.

When his sister Ratnai prayed to him for guidance he advised that serving one's husband is the best spiritual path for women but foresaw by his divine powers that due to past bad karmas like setting quarrels among neighbouring couples and kicking a cow her husband will be a renunciate in later years and she would get afflicted by leucoderma. He asked her to meet him at Papanashana Tirtha at Ganagapur when this happens. (Note: Leucoderma used to be considered as a contagious disease in those days. The term Kushtaroga is used loosely both for leucoderma as well as leprosy.)

From Karanja he came to Triambakeshwar (near Nasik) where he did pilgrimage along the banks of river Godavari. During this pilgrimage he came to Manjarica where he met a Brahmin named Madhavaranya who was a devotee of Shri Narasimha (the fourth avatar of Vishnu with lion head and human body). Madhavaranya used to mentally create His form and perform mental worship (*Manaspuja*). When he saw Shri Guru he saw in him the mental form of Shri Narasimha and immediately surrendered to Shri Guru and became his disciple.

Cured Brahmin's colic Shri Guru then came to a place of pilgrimage called Vasarabrahmeshwar also along Godavari. While taking bath in the river he saw a Brahmin trying to commit suicide and stopped him from committing this unpardonable sin. The Brahmin told Shri Guru that he was suffering from intolerable colic whenever he ate. He ate only once in a fortnight or even once a month out of this fear. He had eaten the previous day and was suffering with intolerable colic. Shri Guru promised him a cure. At that time the village official came there and made his obeisance to Shri Guru. He was a Brahmin named Sayandeo serving as local village chief for his livelihood under the Muslim ruler. Shri Guru instructed him to take the colic afflicted Brahmin and feed him sweets and fried food which would cure him of his colic. Sayandeo promised to do as instructed and requested Shri Guru also to come for meals the next day along with his disciples. Next day, Sayandeo and his wife Jakhai worshipped Shri Guru and his disciples and served food to all including the colic afflicted Brahmin. The Brahmin was instantly free of his disease and went away happy. Shri Guru noted the deep devotion of Sayandeo and gave him the boon that there would be in his lineage many devotees of Shri Guru. It is the great-great-grandson of this Sayandeo that has composed Gurucharitra.

Sayandeo saved from Muslim ruler Sayandeo praised Shri Guru as being Trimurti himself and prayed that he was serving the Muslim ruler who is notorious for killing Brahmins every year. The ruler has ordered to meet him the next day and was surely going to kill him. Shri Guru assured him that nothing

would happen and asked him to visit the ruler without worrying. When the ruler saw Sayandeo he first became angry but Shri Guru frightened the ruler through a vision and thus Sayandeo was sent back with honours and gifts. (Historically, this Muslim ruler was Ahamadshah I, king of Bedar from Bahamani dynasty). Shri Guru then went south asking Sayandeo, who wanted to accompany him, to go back and lead a good family life. He promised that they would meet fifteen years later when he would be staying very near his village.

At Vaijnath Shri Guru then came to Vaijanath (Parli Vaijanath is in Marathwada and is one of the twelve *Jyotirlinga* places) with his disciples. Due to his growing fame many people came to him to become his disciples but most of them had worldly gains in mind. Shri Guru one day called all his disciples and asked them to go on pilgrimage. He gave them detailed instructions on the important places of pilgrimage and rivers which they should visit and asked them to meet him again at Shri Shailam. He then stayed incognito at Vaijanath for one year. (Only the Siddha remained with him throughout his journeys.) While at Vaijanath a Sanyasi came to him requesting to be accepted as a disciple. When asked how he became a *sanyasi* without a guru, he wept and told that he did have a guru but he had become disgruntled with him and had left hm. His complaint was that his guru gave him improper tasks which he did not like to do. This displeased his guru who said that he had not yet achieved a steadiness of mind. Because of this his guru did not tutor him in *Shastras* etc.; hence he had come to Shri Guru seeking his guidance.

Shri Guru advised him that what he had done was like cutting one's own nose to create a bad omen for others and was like defiling a holy place. One should never leave one's guru and illustrated his point through the story of Dhoumya Muni and his three disciples who were tested for complete devotion and surrender to their guru who assigned them difficult household tasks. Only after they passed the tests did Dhoumya Muni send away with blessings to become famous later. The Sanyasi realized his mistake and sincerely repented. Noting his repentance Shri Guru graced him with knowledge and the Sanyasi returned to his guru. This is a lesson in the importance of guru-devotion in the spiritual path.

5.0 IN OUDUMBAR

At Bhilawadi From Vaijanath Shri Guru came to Bhilawadi, a village on the banks of river Krishna, about thirty kilometres from the city of Sangli. (This is the place from which Pune gets a major part of the milk supply now.) There is a famous temple of goddess Bhuvaneshwari in Bhilwadi. Shri Guru used to live on the opposite (right) bank under an Oudumbar tree (a tree of fig family). A dull Brahmin boy from Kolhapur was praying to the goddess for boon of intelligence and when prayers failed he cut and offered his tongue at her feet. She instructed in a vision that he should meet the powerful yogi staying under the Oudumbar tree across the river. He did so and out of compassion Shri Guru put his benevolent hand on the youth's head and immediately he not only regained his tongue but became learned in Vedas and Shastras immediately. Shri Guru stayed in Bhilawadi for some time quietly but how can such an effulgent personality remain hidden? His fame spread there too and after spending the four monsoon months there he decided to leave Bhilawadi. The place where Shri Guru lived under the Oudumbar tree is itself now called Oudumbar and *Paduka* (sandals) of Shri Guru are installed there. These Paduka are worshipped by those who have spiritual goal in mind.

6.0 IN NRISIMHAPUR (NARSOBAWADI)

Shri Guru comes to Amarapur From Bhilwadi Shri Guru came to Amarapur (now known as Ourawad) near the confluence of Panchaganga and Krishna rivers, near the Shirol village and very near the erstwhile state of Kurundwad. There is a temple of Amareshwar (Shiva) here where the sixty-four yoginis also reside and it is a centre of spiritual power. There are a number of holy spots around this place. Shri Guru made his camp on the other bank under an Oudumbar tree. He used to go occasionally for alms to Amareshwar. There was a poor but dedicated Brahmin of excellent character in Amarapur to whose house Shri Guru used to go for alms. The Brahmin had a creeper of beans in his front yard. The Brahmin used the beans for his subsistence whenever he could not get sufficient alms. One day Shri Guru told the Brahmin

that his days of poverty were over and while returning after taking alms from the Brahmin's house chopped off the creeper. His wife was struck with grief at the loss of a source of their food but the Brahmin was a stoic who said that the all-pervading God had made arrangements for subsistence of all creatures from a small ant to an elephant before creating them. Whatever happens is the result of our past *karmas* therefore one should not unnecessarily feel grieved and blame others. He then dug the root of the creeper to throw it away and found a pot of gold coins buried there. Both happily went to Shri Guru and sang his praises. He gave them his blessings and warned them not to reveal their gain to anybody.

Sixty-four yoginis While Shri Guru lived at Amareshwar the sixty-four yoginis used to come to him at noontime and devoutly take him to their residence inside the river for worship and meals. The Brahmins in the village used to wonder how the yogi survived without alms as he did not usually go asking for them anywhere. They tried to keep a watch without results.

But once a boatman tending to his boat near the riverbank saw the sixty-four yoginis visiting Shri Guru and unobtrusively joined the group. When his presence was discovered and he was asked why he had come there the farmer told Shri Guru that he had casually come to see him and praised Shri Guru as being Lord Shiva himself with whose help one can cross this river of worldly existence to get liberated. Shri Guru, pleased at the devotion told him that his days of poverty were over but the day he revealed what he has witnessed he would die. The boatman became a devout disciple. He used to serve Shri Guru daily and one day Shri Guru graced him by taking him to Varanasi, Gaya and Prayag by his yogic powers.

Revives a dead child During his stay a Brahmin woman from the village Shirol, about ten kilometres away (A large sugar factory has been working at Shirol for some years.) came to Shri Guru. She was being tortured by the spirit of a Brahmin whom, in a previous birth, she had owed money before his death. He used to cause her children to be stillborn. Local Brahmins had suggested to her to perform atonement rites to propitiate the spirit but she did not have enough money therefore she surrendered to Shri Guru who liberated the Brahmin from the spirit world. Blessed by Shri Guru the woman then conceived two boys.

Advice to child's mother At the time of the thread ceremony the younger boy died of tetanus. The woman was mad with grief and would not permit the body to be cremated. At that time Shri Guru came in the form of a Sanyasi and gave her sound advice which is worth knowing. He said, "Do not grieve out of ignorance. Who has remained permanently in this world? Who was it that died and who is it that is born? Wherefrom was it created? The whole process is like bubbles appearing momentarily on water. The body is formed when the five principles (earth, water, wind, fire and sky) come together and vanishes when they separate. The attributes of the five principles using the bonds of love create delusion and call that body as son, friend, wife etc. The sense organs are influenced by the three attributes Sattva, Raja and Tama and the actions are done accordingly. But the doer of the actions has to bear the responsibility for them. In this world all creatures are born according to their *karmas* and live in happiness or in sorrow according to their *karmas*. Nobody is free from the justice of the *karmas*. Man is dependent on the body which is controlled by death. Therefore a person as long as he has the body cannot claim to be independent. A wise person should not rejoice birth nor grieve death.

Conception occurs when the formless Brahman assumes a form which later becomes again formless after death. Body is like a bubble. Right from conception it is known as destructible. Body has to suffer as per one's *karmas*. Some die young, some in old age according to their *karmas*. Nobody has conquered death and *karmas*. Because of *Maya* people think that a particular person is father, son, mother, wife, friend etc. One cannot even call this body clean because its creation is accompanied with despicable substances like blood, flesh, faeces and urine.

As soon as one is born, his fate is inscribed inside his forehead and that decides which *karmas* he should enjoy and suffer in this birth. Nobody has conquered death and karmas and the body is not permanent. Shri Guru asked, "You yourself have taken birth many times as human, animal, bird and worms. When you

were a human being, whose mother were you? Whose wife were you? Tell me that. Who were your parents in earlier lives? Why are you unnecessarily crying for your son? Which son and whose death? Why are you unnecessarily crying by delusion?"

All this advice of course did not have any effect on the mother who asked a cryptic question, “If you say fate is superior then why should we be devoted to God? Just as we go to the doctor when a person is ill we approach God and our Guru for their compassion.” The great Guru finally had to perform the miracle of reviving the child.

Narasobawadi Shri Guru now decided to leave Amarapur. He had lived at Amarapur for twelve years. He left his *Paduka* under the Oudumbar tree for worship instructing the sixty-four yoginis that they should make it their abode also. The place is now known as Nrisimhapur or Narasobawadi and is a place of pilgrimage for all devotees belonging to Dattatreya tradition. The *Paduka* installed there are worshipped daily with regular rituals. This place is easily approachable from Sangli, Miraj and Kolhapur. The Paduka are called *Manohar Paduka* and are worshipped for fulfilling worldly desires in contrast with the Paduka at Oudumbar which are worshipped with spiritual desire.

Importance of Oudumbar tree One may well ask why Shri Guru prefers Oudumbar tree for residence. A mythological legend is told (in Gurucharitra) that when Vishnu took avatar of Narasimha and killed the demon Hiranyakashipu, (father of Vishnu's great devotee Prahlada) by tearing out his intestines with bare hands, the poison in the intestines caused inflammation to the fingers. Laxmi, consort of Vishnu brought fruits of Oudumbar tree and asked that the nails be inserted into the fruits. This caused the inflammation to subside immediately. Oudumbar tree is a peculiar tree of fig family which gets fruits without flowers. It is a medicinal tree and its extract, commercially available, is used in Ayurveda internally after children recover from an attack of chickenpox or measles to detoxify the body and regulate the disturbed system.

7. IN GANAGAPUR

From Amarapur Shri Guru went to Ganagapur near the confluence (*Sangam*) of the river Bhima with river Amarja. Shri Guru camped at Sangam about three kilometres from the village Ganagapur without letting anybody know who he was.

Barren buffalo gives milk There were about hundred Brahmin families in Ganagapur. One very poor Brahmin used to live on alms supplemented by hiring out an old barren she-buffalo for carrying salty soil. Shri Guru used to go to this poor Brahmin’s house for alms in preference to the other rich families who used to wonder why he went to that poor Brahmin depriving himself of the good food they would have given. One day, the buffalo had not been hired and the Brahmin himself had not yet returned from his round for alms in the village when Shri Guru went to his house. He was welcomed by the Brahmin’s wife. She offered him a seat and requested him to wait until her husband returned with good food. Shri Guru asked her smilingly why she was saying there was no food when she could have served him milk since they had a buffalo. She politely told that the buffalo was barren, had never given milk and they were treating it like a he-buffalo hiring it out for carrying earth. But Shri Guru told her that she was bluffing and should immediately go and milk the buffalo. She developed a kind of faith on hearing these words. She took a vessel to milk the buffalo as suggested and was surprised to find that the buffalo really gave two vesselfuls of milk. Happy, the woman realized that her visitor was a Godly person. She warmed the milk and cooled it hurriedly because Shri Guru was in a hurry to go back. Shri Guru drank the milk with pleasure and blessed her saying her house would ever be full of wealth and they would live happily with their sons and grandsons. Shri Guru then went back to Sangam. When the Brahmin returned home he learnt about the miracle. He realized that Shri Guru must be an avatar. They then went to Sangam with Arati and worshipped Shri Guru who again blessed them.

Invitation to Ganagapur Next day when people came to hire the buffalo the Brahmin refused to give it on hire saying that the buffalo was now giving milk. This surprised everybody and the story reached the ears of the local ruler who inquired and learnt that a great Sanyasi had come and was living at Sangam

and it was he who was responsible for the miracle. He went to Shri Guru with a decorated palanquin all with fanfare and music. On meeting Shri Guru he prostrated before him and praising him profusely begged of him to come and bless the village of Ganagapur by making it his place of abode. Realizing that time had come to give up living incognito he agreed and was taken in a procession to Ganagapur with great pomp.

A Brahmarakshasa is liberated On entering the village he came near a deserted house with an Ashwattha *(pipul or ficus religiosa*) tree near it. The tree was the abode of a Brahmarakshasa (a terrible type of spirit) who used to live by eating all creatures including people. The house was therefore deserted. When Shri Guru reached there the Brahmarakshasa came down, touched his feet and requested that he should be liberated. Shri Guru asked him to go to Sangam immediately and take bath there. He would then be liberated and there would not be any more rebirths. Thus the Brahmarakshasa was liberated and Shri Guru decided to make that house his Math (headquarters of a saint).

Trivikram Bharati In the early days of his stay in Ganagapur he acquiesced to the request of the local ruler for going to Sangam and back under pomp and show. There was a sanyasi named Trivikram Bharati in the nearby village of Kumasi who criticized that a sanyasi like Shri Guru should indulge in pomp and show and called him a hypocrite. Shri Guru visited him and gave him the vision of Narasimha, the deity Trivikram worshipped. Trivikram surrendered to Shri Guru and became his disciple.

Egotistic Brahmins humbled In a kingdom called Vidura (Bidar) there was a cruel Muslim king who used to hate Brahmins. He declared that he would give money to those Brahmins who would come and recite Vedas to him. (In those days all except Brahmins were prohibited from reading or studying Vedas.)

He used to ridicule them about their committing violence by killing sacrificial animals during yajna at the same time criticizing Muslims for similar killings. Wise Brahmins pretended not to know Vedas and avoided reciting Vedas against the code of *Smriti* to a Muslim but some greedy Brahmins did go. One day a pair of Brahmins came to the king saying that they knew the three Vedas and challenged everybody for a debate on Vedas. They bragged before the king about their knowledge who permitted them to go around in his kingdom and hold debate on the Vedas with whoever wanted to do so. Accordingly they went around and as most of the people did not want to debate with them, collected certificates of victory from them. Ultimately they reached Kumsi where they challenged Trivikram Bharati for debate. Trivikram Bharati refused to debate or to give them the certificate. Instead, to teach them a lesson he took them to Shri Guru who advised them in vain against their egotist pride. They repeated their challenge to Shri Guru who enumerated the contents of the four Vedas explaining how it was impossible for a single person to learn all the Vedas. He warned them not to risk their lives by challenging to the debate. But the Brahmins were adamant.

Chandala elevated to a learned Brahmin Shri Guru then called a passer-by who happened to be a Chandala i.e. an untouchable person of lowest category as understood in those days. Shri Guru asked one of his disciples to draw seven lines. He then asked the Chandala to cross the first line and asked who he was. As soon as he crossed the line he remembered his previous birth as a *kirat* (a bird trapper) and his name was Vanarakha. Every line he crossed brought to him the memory of his still earlier birth until when the seventh line was crossed he said his name was Adhyapak and he was a high caste Brahmin. Shri Guru sprinkled ashes on him and asked him to debate with the two Brahmin. The Brahmins were now shivering with fright at this miracle. They praised Shri Guru and begged his pardon but he said that having committed a grave sin they shall have to spend twelve years as Brahmarakshas; but since they had repented they would be relieved after only twelve years.

In the discourse that followed Shri Guru told of various sins that cause rebirth in lower castes or even as animals and narrated the rituals for the atonement of various types of sins.

The Chandala who still had the Brahmin's characteristics begged of Shri Guru to allow him to continue as a Brahmin but Shri Guru refused because his body was still that of a Chandala. He gave the example of Rishi

Vishwamitra who was initially a Kshatriya and was considered a Brahmarishi only after he had purified his body. He described what kind of behaviour leads to rebirth as a Chandala and about various other sinful behaviours which cause rebirth in painful situations. He also told about various atonements for different types of sins as given in the *Smritis*. Realizing that the Chandala was still under the influence of the power of the holy ashes he arranged that the Chandala should be washed. That brought him back to his usual self and he went home with his wife and children who had come in search of him. Shri Guru then explained to Trivikram Bharati who was wondering how the Chandala regained his original state after washing, that it was due to the application of holy ash to the body that the Chandala became purified but regained his old state once the ash was washed.

Shri Guru then explained the importance of application of holy ash through the story of Rishi Vamadeo and Brahmarakshasa. In this story Shiva and Parvati are described in detail and procedure for applying the ash is described.

8.0 THE DEVOTEES

Shri Guru's fame as a great yogi and saint spread far and wide. Thousands of people began to visit Ganagapur with their problems. Shri Guru helped mitigate problems of thousands of people who came and prayed to him by his yogic powers. Shri Guru lived in Ganagapur for nearly twenty-four years. His stay in Ganagapur is full of miraculous blessings to his disciples whose number was increasing day by day. A few of the instances described in Gurucharitra are given in the following.

Borrowing life from future birth A person from Mahur by name Gopinath was childless. After a lot of prayers to Shri Dattatreya and observance of many *Vratas* a son was born whom he named Datta. He was married to Savitri, a very pretty girl. They were living happily when unfortunately Datta was afflicted with a wasting disease (*Tuberculosis*) which no doctors of that time could cure. As a final effort Savitri suggested that they should visit some great spiritual person by whose grace her husband would surely be cured. With the permission of her mother-in-law and father-in-law, she put Datta in a palanquin and proceeded to Ganagapur to meet Shri Narasimha Saraswati.

After reaching Gangapur, the husband unfortunately died just as Savitri was preparing to go to meet Shri Guru. It was a great shock and it put her into excessive grief. While wailing and thinking of committing *Sati* on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, a Sanyasi came and asked her not to grieve because body is impermanent and everybody has to die some day. He gave her advice about the proper behaviour for a *Pativrata* who has an option after her husband is dead either to commit *Sati* or live the austere life of a widow. He quoted the proper way for a widow to behave according to the laws of Smriti. (Readers should note that the custom of Sati is not Vedic. It was not prevalent during the Ramayana time or in the Mahabharata time. None of the widowed queens seem to have committed Sati except Madri, the second wife of Pandu, but even that story has been added to the original Mahabharata much later. The custom of Sati seems to have been introduced much later, no doubt due to the male selfishness.)

Savitri chose the path of Sati. The Sanyasi advised her to meet Shri Guru before the Sati ritual and gave her four Rudraksha beads, two to be tied to the ears of the dead body and two to be worn by her. He also advised her to take the *tirtha* water from Rudra worship performed in the presence of Shri Guru and put it into the mouth of the body as well as sprinkle on it and herself. When all the preparations for Sati were made Savitri took leave of the Brahmins who were doing the preparations for getting a last *darshan* (vision) of Shri Guru before dying. When the young widow went before Shri Guru and bowed to him he blessed her addressing her as one addresses a married lady with living husband. On bowing for a second time he gave the blessing of children. People explained to Shri Guru that her husband had just died and she was going to be self-immolated as Sati. Shri Guru said it cannot be true and asked the body to be brought to him. When the body was brought he asked some *Tirtha* from the Rudra worship which had just been performed to be put into its mouth. To everybody's surprise the dead husband came to life and they happily worshipped Shri Guru. When a Brahmin asked Shri Guru a very pertinent question that how a per-

son who had died a natural death and not by accident could be revived? Whatever is written in one's fate by Brahmadeo, is it true or false? Shri Guru smiled and told that he had requested for borrowing thirty years of the person's life in the next birth to be used in this birth. Shri Guru then blessed the couple and instructed them to regularly observe certain *vratas*. (The Brahmin who asked the question is roundly abused as a fool and fit for going to hell. The question was an honest question and this incident will surely rankle in the mind of a modern reader.)

Leprosy cured (1) Shri Guru cured two Brahmins and his own sister Ratnai from leprosy. One of the Brahmins by name of Narahari was instructed to plant a dried branch of Oudumbar tree near the bank of the river at Sangam and water it thrice daily and that he would be cured as soon as the branch sprouts a leaf. The Brahmin did as he was told with full faith in Shri Guru. He continued with devotion to water the dry wood as instructed without taking even a sip of water himself. People tried to dissuade and ridicule him for watering a dry branch and when they mentioned this to Shri Guru he told them the following story to impress on them the importance of obeying one’s guru. A *Shabar* (a person belonging to a jungle tribe) was serving a prince. While in the jungle on a hunting trip the Shabar came to an old Shiva temple where many broker Shivalingas were strewn around. The Shabar took fancy to one and picked it. Just then the prince reached there and asked what he was doing. The Shabar told him that he was attracted by the Shivalinga and wanted to worship it but being a Shabar did not know how and would the prince kindly be his guru and teach him how. The prince consented and told him to worship it daily with flowers and offer ashes from a cremation grounds as well as whatever food they eat. Also that after the worship he should put a little of the ashes used in the ashes on his tongue also the offered food. The Shabar agreed and happily went home to tell his young wife who was also pleased.

One day the Shabar did not get ashes even after searching in the surrounding villages. Dejected, he told his wife that he would rather commit suicide than not obey his guru correctly. His wife asked him to burn her in the house and use her ashes. When the Shabar protested saying that she was too young to die and that killing a woman was a great sin she explained that she was his better half and there is no harm in her dying for this body was perishable anyway. After many arguments the Shabar agreed. The wife entered the house and fastened the door. The Shabar set fire to it and after it burnt down took his wife’s ashes and performed the worship as usual. After the worship he called loudly for his wife as used to be his custom to give her part of the food offerings. When his wife really came he was surprised because then he remembered having burnt the house with her inside. The house was also there as before. His wife then told him that when she entered the house she was tremendously felt very sleepy and chilly. She did not know what had happened and that she woke up hearing his calls. He realised it was the grace of Lord Shiva and just then Lord Shiva appeared before them and gave them the boon of happiness, kingdom and a place in heaven for eons to come.

On the seventh day Shri Guru himself went to Sangam, met the Brahmin and watered the plant from his own *kamandalu*. The dry branch at once sprouted leaves and the Brahmin was cured. Thus Shri Guru brought back life not only to human beings but in deadwood as well. Narahari spontaneously sang a self-composed poem of praise for Shri guru comparing him to Dattatreya and equating him to the Supreme Brahman.

I have quoted this story because it shows the importance of obeying one’s guru who need not be a learned person or a sage or a spiritually elevated person but even a spiritually ordinary person as the prince was can be a guru as long as the disciple feels so.

Leprosy cured (2) The second Brahmin named Nandi tried to propitiate the goddess Tulajabhavani at Tulajapur by performing a *vrata* of fasting for three years in order to get cured of his leprosy. The goddess instructed him in a dream to go to another deity called Chandalaa Parameshwari in Karnataka. He repeated the same austerities there and after seven months this goddess told him in a dream to go to Shri Guru at Ganagapur. He was very angry at this tossing around and for being sent to a human being for get-

ting cured. But he was thrown out of the temple by the priests on the instructions from the deity and finally came to Ganagapur. Shri Guru already knew about all this by his occult powers and as soon as the Brahmin met him he asked him why he had come with doubts in his mind and that too to a human being. The Brahmin realized the powers of Shri Guru from his words. He surrendered to him. Shri Guru instructed one of his disciples that he should be made to take bath at Sangam and be given new clothes. After bath he was cured but a little spot remained on the thigh. Shri Guru told him that that was because he had come without complete faith, with a doubt in his mind and asked him to compose poetry in his praise. After he composed much poetry the spots entirely went away. He became one of the close disciples of Shri Guru and was named Kavishwar by him.

Leprosy cured (3) As Shri Guru had predicted his sister Ratnai developed leucoderma and came to Papavinashi Tirtha near Ganagapur. Shri Guru met her and revealed many of her sins for which she was now going through this punishment. She had kicked a cow and started fights between couples. She was also unknowingly responsible for the death of five kittens when she kept the pot in which they were sleeping on fire for boiling water. Shri Guru told her that her leucoderma would go if she wants to postpone the suffering to next birth. However, Ratnai said she was fed up of rebirths and would like to finish everything in this birth itself and get liberated. Shri Guru accepted, instructed her to take bath daily in Papavinashi Tirtha and get rid of her leucoderma as well as the load of the karmas. The leucoderma vanished in three days.

Story of poet Narahari Another poet soon joined the ranks of Shri Guru’s disciples. There was a devotee named Narahari living in the nearby village of Hippargi. He was a dedicated devotee of Lord Shiva and used to compose five poems every day but only in the praise of Shri Kalleshwar the form of Lord Shiva. He refused all the suggestions of many people that he should compose poems in the praise of Shri Guru too saying that Shri Guru was a human being and not God and he would not compose any poems in praise of anybody except Kalleshwar. One day Shri Guru was invited to Hippargi. That day, while Narahari was performing the worship of the Shivalinga, he saw a vision of Shri Guru sitting on the Shivalinga accepting his worship. Shri Guru asked him why he was worshipping a human being. Narahari realized that Shri Guru is an avatar and he went and surrendered to Shri Guru saying that he had not known it before but now he knew that Shri Guru was Kalleshwar and now his mind had become stable. Shri Guru accepted him as disciple and took him to Ganagapur.

Old Ganga gets children Shri Guru blessed Ganga, the sixty year old childless wife of a Brahmin named Somnath with two children even though she was beyond the age of conception. She used to worship Peepul (Ashwattha) tree for many years with the desire of getting children and used to bring a lamp to Shri Guru daily. On Shri Guru's words the fruits of the worship of the Peepul tree came to fruition and she gave birth to a daughter and then a son.

A weaver visits Shri Shailam There used to be weaver in Ganagapur who was a great devotee of Shri Guru. When *Shivaratri* festival approached people started making a pilgrimage to Shri Shailam, one of the places of Lord Shiva’s Jyotirlingas, so as to be present there on *Shivaratri* night. The weaver’s parents and brothers also started on the journey and invited him, but he refused saying that his Mallikarjuna (Shiva’s name) was Shri Guru and his feet were like Shri Shailam. The relatives called him a fool person and proceeded to Shri Shailam.

On Shivaratri day Shri Guru asked the weaver why he had not gone to Shri Shailam and the weaver gave the same reason. Shri Guru asked him to hold his *padukas* (sandals) and close his eyes. In a moment they were at Shri Shailam by Shri Guru’s power. The weaver opened his eyes and was confused finding himself suddenly at Shri Shailam. Shri guru laughed and asked him to go quickly, get his head shaved (as is the custom), take bath and finish the worship of Mallikarjuna. When the weaver went he met his parents and other relatives who asked him why he came secretly instead of accompanying them. He honestly told that

he had started only an hour ago with his Guru and just reached. But nobody believed him and called him a liar.

After shaving and bath the weaver bought flowers and began to perform the worship of Mallikarjuna but to his surprise he saw Shri Guru sitting on the Shivalinga accepting the worship. Surprised, he finished his worship and went to Shri Guru and asked him why people come all the way to worship Mallikarjuna here when they could as well worship him in Ganagapur. Shri Guru laughed and said every holy place has a special power and he told him the story of King Vimarshan from Puranas in which a dog who was killed on Shivaratri day inside a temple while the worship was going on was reborn as the king in the next birth and a pigeon who had circumambulated a temple thrice before being killed by a kite was born as the queen. Both the king and queen visited the place for that reason. He then took him back to Ganagapur same way.

In Ganagapur nobody would believe him when he told that he had just returned from Shri Shailam with Shri Guru, even when he showed them the flowers etc. However, when his parents and relatives returned a few days later everybody was convinced and surprised.

Entire village fed on meals food for three Once a poor Brahmin by name of Bhaskar came to Ganagapur with the intention of offering alms to Shri Guru and get his blessings. He had brought with him material like rice etc. sufficient just for three or four persons. But on the first day itself he was invited to meals by the host who was feeding Brahmins as part of the service to Shri Guru. The Brahmin attended the meals, collected his bundle of his material and used it as pillow for sleeping at night in the caravanserai used by pilgrims. This happened everyday for three months, for there was not a day when somebody or other did not offer meals. The local Brahmins who had become conceited by eating free meals full of delicacies every day began to make fun of Bhaskar which Shri Guru overheard and instructed him to give him alms the next day.

The next day Bhaskar bought vegetables, ghee etc. enough to feed only three or four persons. But Shri Guru instructed him to invite all. With great faith in Shri Guru he did just that. When time came to actually serve the food Shri Guru asked Bhaskar to place the food vessels near him and covered them with his cloth. He then instructed Bhaskar to begin serving with the condition that the cloth should not be removed from the vessels. The Brahmins were first fed after which Shri Guru instructed them to invite people from other communities including the untouchables. The entire population of four thousand persons in the village were fed on the small quantity cooked for only three or four persons. In the end what remained was the food originally prepared by Bhaskar. Shri Guru instructed even that to be released in the river so that fish get it. He then blessed Bhaskar for a good prosperous future. Thus Shri Guru taught a lesson in humility to the leisure-loving Brahmins of Ganagapur. We see from this story how devotion and Guru's benevolence can change fortunes overnight.

Grace to a farmer Shri Guru’s use to go every day for taking bath at Sangam. His path passed along a farm. The farmer used to come daily running as soon as he saw Shri Guru and make an obeisance. But Shri Guru used to walk away without a word. One day Shri Guru asked the farmer what was in his mind that he was coming daily for the obeisance. The farmer humbly said that he and his family were living by Shri Guru’s grace and prayed that he should cast his benevolent eyes on the growing crop. Shri Guru looked at the crop and asked the farmer whether he would do as told. When the farmer said yes Shri Guru asked him to cut the entire crop by the time he returns from Sangam.

The farmer went for permission to the officials who consented only when he agreed to give twice the usual quantity to the treasury. He then called labour and began cutting the crop. His family came crying blaming the farmer for ruining the family by believing the Sanyasi. But the farmer would not budge. He cut the crop and showed it to Shri Guru on his return. Shri Guru said that he had told him in jest but now that he had shown faith and cut the crop benefit will come to him.

In a few days cold rain came and ruined everybody's crop except the farmers. But because he had already cut it, the stalks re-sprouted more than ten times and gave immense yield to the farmer while everybody else in the neighbourhood was ruined. The farmer's wife was repentant for talking ill about Shri guru and begged pardon. They went to Shri Guru and thanked him and received blessings for a prosperous future.

Sayandeo tested Fifteen years had passed since Sayandeo, the ancestor (great-great-grandfather) of Saraswati Gangadhar the Gurucharitra author, had met Shri Guru at Vasarbrahmeshwar. Learning that Shri Guru was at Ganagapur he came speedily and made his obeisance to him singing his praises. Shri Guru welcomed him and after inquiring about the welfare of his family invited him to join at noontime meals. Sayandeo prayed to be included in the group of his disciples. Shri Guru told him that being his disciple meant a very hard life and asked whether he was prepared to bear it. Sayandeo replied affirmatively saying that one who serves his Guru is liberated and does not have to suffer. Guru can give him success in all his four duties in life (*Dharma* or righteous living, *Artha* or earning livelihood,, *Kama* or bodily desires and Moksha or liberation). Serving one's Guru is the main duty. Shri Guru permitted him to stay with him.

One day Shri Guru decided to test him and took him alone to the forest to spend the night there. During the night Shri Guru by his yogic powers created a thunderstorm. Sayandeo protected his Guru from the winds and rain as much as possible without bothering about personal discomfort. Shri Guru sent him to bring fire from the village so that they can remain warm. Sayandeo went as told and brought fire. When he came back the storm was over. Shri Guru then told him the story of the son of Twashta Brahma who went to Varanasi and pleased Lord Shiva in order to satisfy what his Guru and Guru's family had asked of him. Later seeing that Sayandeo could bear the hardships of a disciple's life Shri Guru included him in his group of disciples.

Do's and don'ts in daily routine Gurucharitra includes a wide range of advice to his devotees. Some advice is on spiritual aspects, some on the various penances that different devotees should observe; e.g. Sayandeo was instructed to observe Anantvrata that involves worship of Vishnu while the lady from Mahur whose husband was revived by Shri Guru was asked to observe penance on Mondays that propitiates Lord Shiva.

The period in which Shri Guru lived was a period of Muslim influence. Traditionally, Kshatriyas are supposed to protect the Dharma i.e. the religious code and protect people from external invasions. Brahmins are supposed to stabilize society internally by practicing and preaching correct ethics. But the Muslim invasions weakened the Kshatriya power and many Kshatriyas as well as Brahmins even served the Muslim rulers. While a small number of principled Brahmins continued with the strict traditional life, a large number of them began to succumb to the wealth and other worldly attractions of the new rule becoming lax in their behaviour. Shri Guru's advice and spiritual support did a lot to save the Hindu way of life from crumbling under the Muslim influence. This advice reached reading public through the book Gurucharitra written a century later and is still teaching us the moral way of living.

Story of the Austere Poor Brahmin There was a poor Brahmin in Ganagapur who was very strict in his daily routine and accepted only dry uncooked alms. He never attended public meals offered almost daily by pilgrims visiting Ganagapur. He therefore remained poor but was content. His wife however felt grieved at the poverty and began craving for the tasty preparations of the public meals and the other charitable donations which the women neighbours described to her. She nagged her husband unsuccessfully and as a last resort went to Shri Guru with her complaint. Shri Guru told the Brahmin to accept the next invitation since it was not proper to harbour dissatisfaction at home. Thus the couple attended the meals at the next invitation.

But when the wife began to eat her meals it appeared to her that pigs and dogs are eating food from her plate and other person's plates too. She told this to her husband and both left in disgust. The couple then went to Shri Guru where the wife swore she would never go to such meals again. Shri Guru then told the unhappy Brahmin that no stain had come on him by this happening and he could continue with his earlier

system. He also advised that even though he was strict about not accepting invitations he should never refuse one from a person who is stuck because he could not get anyone else. Refusing such an invitation would be a sin the principle evidently being not to let principles come in the way of helping the needy.

Chapters 36 and 37 of Gurucharitra give detailed instructions on how a Brahmin should behave and spend his daily life. On the Brahmin's request Shri Guru advised him about the kind of homes and people from whom food should be accepted or not accepted. Also he advised him, on the basis of Parashara *Smriti*, the proper routines for Brahmins to follow right from waking up in the morning until he went to bed. That included what he should do after waking up, offering of *arghya* to the rising (and also setting) sun, proper way to clean the mouth and teeth, proper way to take bath, performance of *sandhya* ritual (with Gayatri mantra) three times daily, proper way to worship the house deities with sandal paste, flowers, incense and light, proper food and proper way to eat, rituals before, during and after eating, when and where to sleep etc. including the conjugal life.

There are some parts of this advice which a modern reader would apparently absurd and anachronistic. This is discussed in some detail towards the end of the chapter (See: Conflict with science later)**.**

Washer-man king The washer-man to whom Shripad Shrivallabh had given the boon of becoming a king was born in the next birth in the royal family of the Muslim king of Vidura (Bedar). (Historically his name was Allauddin II of the Bahamani dynasty). Due to the influence of his earlier birth he was kind to Brahmins against the wishes of the Muslim priests. He used to tell them, "You tell that God is everywhere so what does it matter if Hindus worship stone idols? They do it only because it is convenient to imagine an image rather than a formless God."

One day the king got a boil on his thigh which nobody could cure. Some Brahmins suggested that it would get cured if a great spiritual person cast his benevolent eyes on the ailing part. He was sent to a lonely place where he met a yogi who sent him to meet Shri Guru (after telling him a story from the Puranas). As soon as Shri Guru saw the king the first question he asked was, "Where were you all this time Oh washer-man?" On hearing this, the King remembered his past birth. His boil was cured. He invited Shri Guru to see his wealth and to bless his family. Shri Guru agreed on the conditions that animals would not be killed. He visited the king's palace, asked the King to give up his position to his children and meet him at Shri Shailam.

9.0 PRELUDE TO SAMADHI

Decision to leave Ganagapur Now that the Muslim king had started visiting Shri Guru there was the danger of other Muslim persons visiting Ganagapur and disturb its traditional religious life. Shri Guru then decided to leave Ganagapur and live incognito elsewhere but publicly announcing that he was going on pilgrimage to Shri Shailam. People in Ganagapur were very unhappy and prayed to Shri Guru saying they would be like orphans if he left them. Shri Guru promised that though physically he might be leaving Ganagapur, he would continue to be there spiritually and his true devotees would be able to see him. He then left Ganagapur with some of his disciples.

Before leaving, Shri Guru said, "Do not harbour any doubt about my always being in Ganagapur day and night. I shall accept your worship in formless state in the Math. I love my devotees and it is my assured promise that their wishes will get fulfilled. The Ashwatha tree at Sangam is really a wishing tree. Worship it and come to the Math where I am leaving behind my Nirguna (attributeless) Paduka which you should worship with dedication." And really when people returned after bidding farewell to Shri Guru they saw him at the Math and were assured about Shri Guru's promise. After a moment this vision vanished and he was visible only to the loving devotees.

It is more than six centuries after this event. People visit Ganagapur in large numbers to offer their services to Shri Guru. The services may be donation, reading of Gurucharitra, rituals like *abhishek* (bath) to the Paduka etc. Some come with desires in mind and some with pure devotion. People find their wishes ful-

filled and experience uplift in their spiritual level. There is a peculiar custom at Ganagapur. Visitors, rich or poor are supposed to beg for food in the morning or noontime. The Brahmins in Ganagapur keep food ready and offer it to the visitors as a daily ritual. Such a ritual obviously can take the ego from a person's mind. Persons who are suspected to be possessed by spirits are also taken there to get rid of their affliction.

To Shri Shailam After bidding farewell to Ganagapur Shri Guru reached the banks of River Patalganga with four of his disciples. There he asked them to make a floating seat with flowers. Before leaving by the boat he said, "I love singing and I shall remain in the home of those who remember me by singing. Such people will not be wanting in anything. Those who will read my biography or read it to others will remain wealthy." He asked the disciples to wait for flowers which would come floating as his grace. He then left instructing that after picking up the flowers they should go back and spend their days in devotion. After some time four Shevanti (Chrysanthamums) flowers came floating which each of them picked up as *prasada* and returned to Ganagapur. The names of the disciples who received the flowers were Sayandeo, the two poets Nandi and Narahari and the Siddha who narrated the Gurucharitra to Saraswati Gangadhar.

Thus ends the life history of the great yogi Shri Narasimha Saraswati but only the first part of the life history. Saraswati Gangadhar tells in Gurucharitra that Shri Guru disappeared into the Kardali forest.

As in the case of Shripad Shrivallabh we see in Shri Narasimha Saraswati also a great, dispassionate and compassionate yogi. He is a true guide to his devotees, not only giving material benefits but spiritual guidance as well. Like Shripad Shrivallabh Shri Guru gives his grace to all irrespective of his or her caste or even religion.

But other evidence shows that he did not take *samadhi* in Kardali forest but went to north where he spent more than three hundred years in austerities and in a state of deep trance. When he came out of *samadhi* he travelled southwards under the name Chanchalbharati and after a lot of travelling finally settled in 1857 at Akkalkot in Maharashtra before finally leaving his body in 1878. This will be told in the Part V on Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot..

10.0 CALENDER OF EVENTS

Shri Narasimha Saraswati lived from 1378 CE to 1459 CE as per most of the scholars. The main events of his life are given below with the possible years and dates are fixed as per the description of the lunar and stellar events calendar mentioned in Shri Guru Charitra. (REF Dhere, Wikipedia - Narasimha Saraswati)

1378 CE : Birth
1385 CE : Upanayan (Thread ceremony)
1386 CE : Left his home
1388 CE : Took Sanyasa
1416 CE : Arrival back home at Lad-Karanja
1418 CE : Gautami-Tatak-Yatra (travel along the banks of river Gautami)
1420 CE : Stay at Parali-Vaijanath
1421 CE : Stay at Oudumbar near Bhilawadi.
1422 CE-1434 CE : Stay at Narasoba Wadi
1435 CE-1458 CE : Stay at Ganagapur
14 January 1459 CE : Samadhi at ShriShaila Mountain

11.0 A COMMENTARY

About Kardali Forest Many questions have been asked about where this Kardali forest where Shri Narasimha Saraswati went from Ganagapur. Recently some devotees have organised trips to this place. According to their sketchy description it is located near the Mallikarjuna temple on at Shri Sailam Mountain by the banks of Patalganga Krishna river in Andhra Pradesh. To reach the place of Samadhi one has to first travel by boat and then walk 14 km up and down in a deep and thick forest. There is no proper route. One has to walk on the rocks in the hills. At least 3 hills are to be crossed. Water is not available but there is a lake of sweet water near the cave of where Shri Narasimha Saraswati took Samadhi.

About Gurucharitra Gurucharitra is read by thousands of Dattatreya devotees in Maharashtra regularly. Being a powerful text its reading gives the experience of spiritual uplift and a sort of divine ecstasy. It is supposed to be read not like a story book but with proper respect and ritual, after the regular daily bath and in a clean pleasant environment such as at the place of worship at home. But there are people who, out of constraints from their work or business, do not get enough time but manage to perform the reading whenever and wherever possible. The important point to be noted is that it is the devotion that is important and not the ritual.

Gurucharitra contains 7421 *ovis* (stanzas) (including 176 Sanskrit Shlokas of Guru-Gita) in fifty-two chapters. (The edition corrected by Mr. Ramachandra Krishna Kamat published by K. B. Dhavale is referred here. Some corrupted editions give fifty-three chapters, but the fifty-first and fifty-second chapters are virtually similar.) The last chapter is what is called *avatarnika* which gives one *ovi* description of the contents of each chapter is a later addition. Many devotees finish the reading in one week (*Saptaha*) or three days or even one day. In the *saptaha* reading number of chapters to be read each day are specified in the *avataranika*. During the *saptaha* the devotee has is to observe certain austerities. In the end the *avatarnika* should be read followed by Arati of Shri Dattatreya. (*Avatarnika* is not an original chapter. It was added much later.)

Gurucharitra narrates the activities and advice of Shri Guru to the visiting devotees. The narration is through the lips of Siddha, supposedly one of the disciples of Shri Guru. Shri Guru made Ganagapur a place of pilgrimage which thousands visited. Those who begot children as Shri Guru’s grace named the children after him. There was such a person named after Shri Guru hence the appellation “Namdharak” meaning one who holds the name, who sets out in search of Shri Guru and is met on the way by a Sanyasi calling himself Siddha, whose grace he receives. This Siddha takes Namdharak with him to Ganagapur and narrates him the activities of Shri Guru preceding it with stories about the birth of Shri Dattatreya and the birth and activities of Shripad Shrivallabh.

Shri Guru explains to his devotees many points of spiritual interest through stories from various Puranas and guides them through instructions according to the mental makeup of the devotee. Many stories extol the importance of devotion and service of his Guru. One chapter is fully devoted to the Sanskrit text of Guru-Gita from Skanda Purana. It is presented as the conventional dialogue between Shiva and Parvati describing how one should serve one’s Guru.

A chapter is devoted to the repercussions (such as rebirth in a certain situation or species) of various kinds of sins and is an important ethical guideline. Two long chapters in Gurucharitra (36^{th} and 37^{th}) are devoted to the advice given by Shri Guru to a Brahmin, on the basis of *Smritis*, on the subject of the proper routines for Brahmins to follow right from waking up in the morning until he goes to bed. To a modern reader born and brought up in an urban environment these two chapters may appear anachronistic and impossible to follow. (In today’s cities one cannot even feed a cow as certain rituals require since cows are banned in many metropolitan cities). It is true that the advice cannot be followed totally in the modern lifestyle of work and urban environment. But the reader should understand that during the times Shri Guru lived this advice was appropriate for maintaining clean hygiene but good morals. With the modern

working life with strict duty timings and constraints city life and travel the devotee is compelled to adjust the observances to a convenient level at the same time not letting the devotion and morals go astray.

It is surprising that nowhere in Gurucharitra there is a mention that Dattatreya should be worshipped. It is natural that Shripad Shrivallabh and Shri Narasimha Saraswati do not call themselves as avatars of Dattatreya for as mentioned in Part I, avatar is a designation given by the devotees and it is Saraswati Gangadhar who portrays them as avatars of Dattatreya. During the time of Narasimha Saraswati Muslim rule was well entrenched in Maharashtra-Karnataka—Andhra region. It was the task of Narasimha Saraswati to save the religion from the Muslim influence which he did by proper spiritual advice, by prohibiting people from serving Muslims (as in the case of Sayandeo) but at the same time partly yielding also as in the case of the Muslim king. In situations like this there is always a cultural give and take. This has been discussed at some length in the Part III on Shripad Shrivallabah where we saw Dattatreya being accepted by the Sufi Sect of the Muslims while Hindus accepted their custom of using incense and music during the worship.

Another surprising aspect of Gurucharitra is that though Dattatreya is portrayed as an avatar of Vishnu, what is prescribed in most places is Shiva worship. It is only in one place, that Vishnu worship is recommended. This is when Sayandeo is asked to worship Ananta after he is given a spiritual tour of Kashi.

Conflict with science A modern reader may find some of the statements in the 37th chapter absurd and not consistent with the modern scientific knowledge. For example there is a statement that a boy would be born if the conception takes place on an even day and a girl if it occurs on an odd day counted after the beginning of menstruation. Modern medical knowledge says that there would be conception only if the intercourse occurred between the ninth and the twenty-first day after the beginning of menstruation and the gender of the child cannot be predicted. A second statement is about the cot used for sleeping. It is said that the weaving of the cot (by string or strip) done on different days of the week gives different results; e.g. one gains wealth by weaving on Sunday, many sons on Thursdays and death on Saturdays. There are similar arbitrary statements about the results of taking ritualistic bath on different days. Modern reader must not allow such statements to affect his mind and form wrong impressions about Shri Guru or Gurucharitra because that was the understanding of those times when science and scientific spirit of experimentation was yet to develop. The reader should remember that in the western world, supposed to be the cradle of modern science and technology today, the situation in those times was worse than that in India because in India we had at least great thinkers (*Rishis*) but there were none of that calibre in the west then. People resorted to superstitions and burned people suspected to be witches in which category even a person prescribing an herbal medicine was included.

A pious person generally believes anything written in Puranas and other similar literature. If he is told that observance of Mondays pleases Lord Shiva and Fridays the Devi is a Vedic statement he will blindly believe it without considering the fact that the custom of weekdays did not even exist in the Vedic times and was borrowed from the Chaldeans in middle east only in about second century BC. For the pious it is the devotion that is more important than anything else.

For the educated person however such illogical statements create an obstacle in his belief in the spiritual path. He should refer to Tripura Rahasya in which Shri Dattatreya himself has stressed that deliberation and discrimination are essential in spiritual path. Every aspect of a situation must be critically analyzed and then only, after using discrimination the next step should be taken. Later he stresses that dull persons cannot advance in spiritual path. He has to wait until a later birth when he is born as an intelligent person. An educated person must therefore examine every statement and must be bold enough to reject what does not appeal to logic. Faith is needed in God and not in the rituals prescribed in the texts unless of course his Guru prescribes it for reasons known to him.

One should also note that science does not solve all human problems nor explain all phenomena on this earth. Especially, science does not explain phenomena associated with the soul. Swami Ram in his autobiographical book “Among the Saints in Himalayas” mentions a yogi known to him who had transmigrated

into the body of another person who had just died. Swami Krishnanand mentions in his book "True Experiences", again an autobiographical book, an incident where he met a yogi in Jagannathpuri in Orissa, who had planned to die soon by his yogic powers and would be reborn as a girl two months later in a village near Kolkata. Swami Krishnanand objected to this statement saying that it would take at least nine months to be reborn as another body, to which the yogi explained that the soul to be reborn attaches to the foetus between seventh and eighth month. Until then, the foetus is merely a blank body of blood, bone and flesh, nourished through the mother's soul-force and fed by the building essences through the umbilical cord. It is only after the merger of the astral body with it that the unborn baby begins to experience pain and pleasures and remembers its past lives. After birth, the baby's umbilical cord is cut off and from then onwards it derives the sustaining energy and the life current from the subtle body that has taken over. This is made possible through the silver cord, which joins the subtle body to its physical one. Para-psychological studies support this information. There is another power, which determines, taking into consideration his *karmas,* as to which foetus he is supposed to be attached to. Swamiji did go to Calcutta, met the blacksmith and found that his wife was expecting a baby but not until late March according to the doctors. But the girl was born on the exact date (25-2-1954) as stated by the yogi. What he had told about the girl's life also came true. The girl named Rekha, was a simple, calm, quiet child and used to spend her time in a nearby temple. One day she was found to be playing fearlessly with a snake. Swamiji met her last when she was fourteen, but could not bring himself to reveal to her parents about her short life. Now no conventional branch of science can explain this phenomenon.

Was Siddha real? It is clear from the Gurucharitra text that Namdharak is really Saraswati Gangadhar the great-great-grandson of Sayandeo. Whether Siddha who narrates the Gurucharitra to Namdharak is a real character or an imaginary one is difficult to say. It was customary in many ancient Indian texts to present the composition as a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati, or between Purana characters like the various Rishis and kings. It is likely that Saraswati Gangadhar collected the various legends about Shri Guru and wrote them as if narrated by Siddha. Note that Saraswati Gangadhar being the great-great-grandson of Sayandeo the Gurucharitra events must have occurred at least a century earlier. Siddha must have been more than 150 years old when he narrated the events to Saraswati Gangadhar. Even granting that this is possible for an accomplished yogi, it appears doubtful that Shri Guru would have kept the same disciple with him throughout while sending everybody else away on pilgrimage and leaving him at Ganagapur while going to Kardali Forest. In most likelihood therefore Siddha must be an imaginary character created by Saraswati Gangadhar. Again this is only of academic interest to devotees.

It should also be noted that the poems of praise by the devotees Narahari and Sayandeo are really composed by Saraswati Gangadhar as is mentioned in the poems itself. If Siddha was real the poems would have been shown as composed by these two people.

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PART III

THIRD AVATAR:

SHRI SWAMI SAMARTH OF AKKALKOT



Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot

1.0 EMERGENCE OF SWAMI SAMARTH

We do not talk of birth of Swami Samarth but only his appearance. There are two versions of his appearance in public, in one he just appeared mysteriously as an eight year old boy and in another he is the same as Shri Narasimha Saraswati who reappeared after remaining three centuries in Samadhi state. In either story there is no birth mentioned.

The two versions about the appearance of Swami Samarth are discussed in the following.

The first version According to the first version Shri Narasimha Saraswati left Kardali Forest and went north to Badri Forest where highly advanced yogis go for meditation. He spent several years there in *tapas* in the state of samadhi. In the course of time his body was completely covered by anthills. Anthills are common in forests and since it is believed that they are the abodes of snakes people generally do not go near them or disturb them. Thus Shri Narasimha Saraswati was left undisturbed.

Nearly three centuries passed. One day a woodcutter was cutting wood in the forest. Accidentally his axe hit the anthill and a yogi injured in the thigh came out. The woodcutter realized that he had done something horrible and was frightened. He prostrated before the yogi begging for mercy, but he was not only pardoned but gained from the yogi's blessings not only in this world but in the next as well. The person who came out was not physically similar to Shri Narasimha Saraswati. He was effulgent with red complexion, more than seven feet tall with long hands reaching well below his knees. This was the form with which devotees of Swami Samarth of Akkalkot are familiar. This reappearance of Shri Narasimha Saraswa-

ti in a new personality is considered to be consistent with the legend that Swami Samarth was not born through the womb.

However, some people do not agree with this version because yogis do not choose places easily approachable by public therefore it is unlikely that Shri Narasimha Saraswati chose this place for penance. But one cannot deny the possibility what was not approachable can become approachable over a period of three centuries. Secondly there is a huge contrast not only in the physique but in the nature of the two. Shri Narasimha Saraswati was of medium build while Shri Swami Samarth very tall with long hands. In nature Shri Narasimha Saraswati was a serene person while Shri Swami Samarth was playful like a child.

The second version According to this version Swami Samarth first appeared in the village of Chelikheda about 24 miles from Hastinapur (Hastinapur is about 100 Km north-east of Delhi on the banks of the River Ganga) on the second day of *Chaitra* month (The day after *Gudi Padwa* - Shalivahan Shaka new year) as an eight year old boy in the year 1149 AD. This is according to the horoscope prepared by Mr. Nana Rekhi, an expert astrologer. This horoscope was approved by Swami Samarth. This was also the opinion of Haribhau Tawade or Swamisut, a close disciple of Swami Samarth. *Chaitra* 2 is celebrated as “*Prakatdin*” i.e. day of manifestation, on a large scale at the Swamisut Math which is now in Chembur Mumbai. Mr. Hanmante, author of “A Glimpse of Divinity: Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot” supports this view and gives supporting literature which includes, besides the poems of Swamisut the experience of the vision Mr. Anant Ranjekar, a highly accomplished devotee of Shri Swami Samarth in which Shri Swami Samarth emerged as an eight year old boy in response to the urgings of his child devotee Vijaysingh to come and play a game of marbles. Some devotees typically Shakatai Agate and Nana Gadre have confirmed that Swami Samarth first manifested as an eight year old boy in or near Hastinapur on Chaitra Shuddha 2 about 862 years ago (presumably w.r.t. 1999, the year of publication.)

For a layman it would be difficult o decide which version is correct. Once, a British barrister and a Parsi gentleman came to Akkalkot to meet Swami Samarth. Though they had wanted to ask many questions to Swami Samarth they were so much impressed by the effulgence exuded by him that they asked only one question, “Where do you come from?” Swami Samarth’s reply was, “I first left Kardali forest and visited cities like Calcutta. After wandering in Bengal I visited Goddess Kali. Then, wandering along the banks of Ganges I visited thousands of places of pilgrimage like Hardwar, Kedareshwar, Gangotri, Badrinath, Dwaraka and Ayodhya and came to the banks of river Godavari. I stayed for many years in Hyderabad and Mangalwedhe. Then I went to Pandharpur, Begampur and Mohol and after staying there for some time I came to Akkalkot and am here since then. Swami Samarth often said his name was Nrisimhabhan.

Acceptance of the second version raises a disparity. If Swami Samarth was born (manifested) in 1149 AD then it means that he was really the first avatar because first two avatars Shripad Shrivallabh (1320-1350AD) and Shri Narasimha Saraswati (1378-1458 AD) lived during his lifetime i.e. 1149 - 1878. It is of course not impossible that Shri Dattatreya took the two avatars while the real first avatar was still living. But where was he during this period? Devotees have reported the meeting of Swami Samarth and Shri Manikprabhu (1817-1865) of Humanabad considered as the fourth avatar of Shri Dattatreya. So now we face the incongruity the so-called first two avatars as well as the fourth avatar occurred during the lifetime of Swami Samarth.

It has been stressed in Part I that such historical incongruities are only of academic interest and they do not matter for the devotees. For any saint it is after his emergence and interaction with public that his history matters and becomes known. This should be true of Swami Samarth too. His activities after his public emergence have been well described in the diary (*bakhar*) of Kelkarbuva and in the collections of the experiences by Mr. Ganesh Mulekar both disciples of Swami Samarth. The book by Mr. Shripadhastri Kinjavadekar is a well researched book in Marathi on the life and work of Shri Swami Samarth based on Guruleelamrita by Vamorikar. In this book Kinjavdekarshastri gives an interesting commentary and interpretation on the activities. Guruleelamrit presents many incidents which were witnessed by Vamanbuwa

or were narrated to him by concerned persons. In the following a brief summary of the activities mainly from these two sources is presented.

2.0 AFTER LEAVING BADRI FOREST

Swami Samarth after his reappearance in Badri forest went spent some time in the Himalayan region. Then he went to Varanasi and then to Gangotri. From there he came to a place called Devalgram where he established his *Padukas* and went to Rajur where he established a Math arranging a grant of eight villages as income for maintenance. After a few years he handed this establishment to his disciples and left for further travels. During all these years of travel he was known by many names one of them being Chanchalbharati (However he will be called only by the name Swami Samarth henceforth to avoid confusion). For a *Siddhayogi* (yogi with occult powers) it would not be surprising that his travels are associated with many miracles. In fact in the long run only the stories of the miracles generally survive in the life history of such great persons. This is true in the case of Swami Samarth too.

Two stories about Swami Samarth during the period he was in the Himalayan region are given below:

The Chinese couple While Swami Samarth was sitting in a cave a Chinese couple in search of medicinal plants came there. Seeing this strangely dressed person they started wondering among themselves whether he as a demon, devil or a magician. They made fun of him and after a while engaged themselves in amorous activities. Suddenly a miracle took place. The woman turned into a man. The couple were frightened and realised this was the result of the fun they had made of the strange looking person. When they surrendered to him Swami Samarth showed his compassion by reverting them to their original state and sent them away advising them to follow a spiritual path.

The Deer Family and the Hunters Once when Swami Samarth was sitting in the snow covered forest, four hunters arrived. Seeing them a frightened deer calf came running to Swami Samarth and hid behind him. Swami Samarth took the calf in his lap. The hunters saw this and started shooting indiscriminately at Swami Samarth himself. Swami Samarth took couple of stones and threw them in their direction and the hunters became locked in their position not able to move their limbs. After some time, Swami Samarth felt compassion for the hunters who surrendered to him pleading that they had to hunt for their livelihood. Advising them they should show kindness to all living beings and lead a righteous life he let them go.

At that moment a deer couple came there looking for their lost calf. They found Swami Samarth sitting quietly there with their calf. The deer couple did not feel frightened probably due to the vibrations of love and compassion saints radiate. They approached Swami Samarth who looked at them and said smilingly, "Oh Brahmin, have you not recognized me? You were my devotee at Ganagapur and were relieved of your disease after serving me. Because you maltreated some saintly persons you were born in animal species. You have met me because you did some good deeds too." Swami Samarth kept his hand on the deer's head and the deer started speaking: Maharaj, I served you but due to my maltreating the saints I had to be reborn seven times. My first rebirth was that of a Brahmin but a diseased one; second birth was that of a bull and had to toil; third was that of a *Shudra* in Vaidura where I lived with my wife a life of utter poverty and sorrow; fourth time I was a weaver and again lived a sorrowful life along with my wife; though I lived in Varanasi, due to adulterous life my fifth rebirth was that of a donkey; in the sixth lifetime I was a goldsmith and misappropriated a lot of gold but since my wife gave generous gifts to saints I was reborn as a deer in this seventh rebirth. Due to the merit of earlier service I have been graced with meeting you. Now please free us from these life cycles.

The compassionate Swami Samarth said, "After some time I shall wander to the south when you will come and meet me born as a human being. You will be liberated then. Saying this Swami Samarth returned to the cave and the deer couple happily went away with their calf.

Swami Samarth left the forest and wandered far and wide throughout India. Some of the events that occurred during these wanderings and how Swami Samarth graced the devotees are described in the following.

3.0 JAGANNATHPURI

Swami Samarth wandered to Jagannathpuri (often called only as Puri) famous for the temple of Shri Krishna, his brother Balaram and sister Subhadra. It is one of the four *Peethas* established by Adi Shankaracharya.

Alawani Maharaj A saint from Baroda by name Alawani Maharaj known for his detached nature had come to Puri with two or three companions on pilgrimage but all had fallen ill and could neither eat nor go out for alms. (He never ate salt; *lawan* means salt in Sanskrit and hence the name). Other pilgrims, engrossed in their own affairs simply ignored them. Finally, very weak and on the verge of death, Alawani Maharaj prayed to Shri Jagannath to relieve him from the calamity and suddenly there stood before him an effulgent personality with hands on the waist. Alawani Maharaj and his companions at once gained strength and made obeisance to the effulgent person and humbly enquired who he was and where he lived. He replied that he was known as Vriddha (Aged) Narasimha Saraswati and he was everywhere in the world but Sahyadri mountains, Girnar, Varanasi, Matapur (Mahur), Karavir (Kolhapur), Panchaleshwar, Kuravapur, Oudumber, Karanjanagar, Narsimhawadi and Ganagapur were his favourite places.

Just then, enticing odours of food came from the neighbouring house and shortly afterwards Alawani Maharaj and his companions were invited for meals. Swami Samarth instructed them to go ahead and eat. And with that all their illness vanished like magic.

Swami Samarth was known as Vriddha (old) Narasimha Saraswati in those days. Due to this miracle and many others his fame spread around Puri. Seeing this, Swami Samarth suddenly disappeared from Puri. This story was told by Alawani Maharaj himself to Vamanbuva Vamorikar the author of Guruleelamrit, a book in verse on the life of Swami Samarth.

Alawani Maharaj returned to Baroda and spent his life helping people and in spiritual pursuit. He used to behave like a deranged person to keep unwanted people away.

4.0 HARDWAR

From Puri Swami Samarth came to Hardwar where he cured two persons from leprosy. Kinjavadekarshastri has made some very appropriate comments on the background of these cures. The afflictions of the body are always related to afflictions of the mind which occurs first. Swami Samarth removed these mental afflictions first by showing to the afflicted the error of their ways of thinking and behaviour. This was done sometimes through a confession from the afflicted; if the person was arrogant then he would be put through a ridiculous situation through yogic powers making him realize that there are higher powers controlling the affairs of the world. In the above two cases Swami Samarth made them remember their deeds in earlier lives as well as in this life and atone their sins by making them confess publicly.

Hypocrite Brahmin humbled One day a Brahmin of good social standing but really a hypocrite with bad habits approached Swami Samarth with the intention of to ridicule him. The first question he asked was about who Swami Samarth was and wherefrom he had come. Swami Samarth fixed his steady penetrating eyes on the Brahmin which unnerved him. Swami Samarth then asked him loudly whether or not he had killed a cow previous day for its meat. Hearing this question the entire public started shouting against the Brahmin who at once surrendered and prostrated before him. This event cured the Brahmin permanently.

Swami Samarth asked the Brahmin to take him to the killed cow. He then challenged him to prove the genuineness of his repentance by reviving the cow. The Brahmin said, "Oh Guru! It can happen only by your grace!", and sprinkled some water from the washing of the feet of Swami Samarth. Everybody was surprised to see the cow come to life.

Now that the Brahmin had come on proper path Swami Samarth replied to his question as to who he was etc. He said that he was a Yajurvedi Brahmin, his name was Narasimhabhan, living in Dattanagar and that his place was Banyan tree. He then coached the Brahmin in reciting Vedas and advised him that one should be respectful to saints and Brahmins; one should be kind, soft spoken and behave discriminating between good and evil and realize God within oneself and perform one's prescribed duties. So advising Swami Samarth immediately left Hardwar.

5.0 LAKE NARAYAN

Next he appeared in Saurashtra at a place called Shrikrishna Trivikram. Pilgrims visiting Dwarka visited this place in large numbers. There was a lake here named Narayan near the beautiful temple of Shrikrishna Trivikram. People believed that a bath in this lake would wash the sins of many past births. Unfortunately the priests used this belief to exploit pilgrims by charging them large sums of money. (This is a scene in many places of pilgrimage in India and has given a bad name to religion and a weapon to atheists to criticize those who believe in God.)

The Chief priest had employed strongmen to prevent people from taking bath without payment. When Swami Samarth came there the strongmen looked at his semi-naked form and started ridiculing him. But Swami Samarth marched ahead with his followers for bathing in the lake and was challenged by the strongmen who demanded money or else. Swami Samarth used his yogic powers to go over their heads and walk on water. He then sat on the water surface as if it was land. The strongmen and their employer priests were now frightened at this display of yogic power they had never seen before. The priests surrendered to Swami Samarth, prayed to him and sang his praises. Swami Samarth then came back on the land. He was then worshipped and meals were given to public.

Clearing pundit's doubts There was a learned person (*a pundit*) among those present but though learned he had not attained Self-Realization. He had just seen the miracles and doubts were rising in his mind as to how these miracles were possible. Swami Samarth read his thoughts and remarked to him that he himself was a wanderer so could not be a learned person like him. Realizing that Swami Samarth read his thoughts the learned person surrendered to Swami Samarth. Swami Samarth asked him where his parents were and was told that they died thirty-six years ago. Swami Samarth then asked, "Is it so? Then who is swinging the cradle of your son at this moment? That is really your father." To the confused man Swami Samarth further told that his father had become a cobra in this birth because of his unfulfilled desires in the last birth. There is no liberation unless desires vanish. Actually, people had seen the cobra and not knowing the truth had gathered there to kill it. The cobra crawled away to lay itself at Swami Samarth's feet. Holding it in his hand Swami Samarth asked it why he should expect kindness from these people when he himself had not shown it to anyone in his earlier life as a human being. He then asked the snake to enter the lake. Swami Samarth then told those present that the snake will be reborn in a family of yogis and will be progressively liberated. He then vanished from there.

6.0 DWARKA

From Lake Narayan Swami Samarth came to Dwarka. There was a yogi named Bhurebuwa who had attained *siddhis* (occult powers). Many people came to him for having his *darshan* and get rid of their problems through his grace. But Bhurebuwa was unhappy not because of material problems but because he had not yet had a vision of Shri Dattatreya.

Once, while he was meditating on Shri Dattatreya he fell asleep and saw wonderful scenes like rivers, mountains, oceans etc. Then in that dream itself he came on the banks of a river where he saw Shri Dattatreya in three headed form. Full of emotions he was wet with sweat. He prostrated and was standing when the form of Shri Dattatreya began to vanish and its place was taken by that of Swami Samarth.

In the dream itself Bhurebuwa praised Swami Samarth who asked him what his doubts were. Bhurebuwa had got his doubts while reading Vedanta. The interpretations of the words "Tatwamasi" in Vedanta by

the followers of Dualism (*Dwaita*) was given as "You belong to Him" while followers of Monism (*Adwaita*) interpreted it as "You are that". Swami Samarth explained to him the meaning of the sentence elaborately. After his doubts were cleared Bhurebuwa praised swami Samarth and prostrated before him. As he arose from the prostrated position Bhurebuwa went into deep *samadhi* state and began enjoying divine bliss. Swami Samarth kept his benevolent hand on his head and Bhurebuwa at once came out of the dream and found Swami Samarth was really there.

Entire Dwarka rejoiced this event and hailed Swami Samarth. Many spiritual aspirants who had seen the Bhurebuwa's spiritual transformation came to have a *darshan* of Swami Samarth and receive his blessings and guidance. The whole town was engrossed in the festivities.

Among them were a congenital blind person named Surdas desirous of seeing Swami Samarth and one Ravji Vamorikar (father of Vamanbuva Vamorikar). Bhurebuwa prayed to Swami Samarth on behalf of Surdas for blessings of gaining his sight and on behalf of Ravji for spiritual blessings. Swami Samarth asked Surdas to open his eyes and he would see.

Swami Samarth told Ravji that he had met him in Varanasi twice, once when he had cured his old mother and second time to rid him of some personal difficulties. Ravji then remembered the incidents and recognized Swami Samarth. Surrendering to Swami Samarth he sang his praises calling him Brahman personified.

Swami Samarth was very pleased with Ravji and told him that his eldest son would be a learned person of character and would meet him in south in a Muslim ruled region. His second son would be a devotee of Shiva and remain a bachelor while his third son would follow the Guru tradition and arrange for the stories of his activities to people. (This third son was Vamanbuva Vamorikar). Swami Samarth was known here as "Shrikrishna Dattatreya Narasimhamuni". Swami Samarth then left for Girnar.

7.0 MOUNT GIRNAR

Mount Girnar is a holy place for people belonging to Dattatreya Tradition, Nath sect, devotees of Devi as well as for Jains. Lord Dattatreya performed penance at the top of the hill. Various *sadhaks* have reported having had *darshan* of Lord Dattatreya during their pilgrimage to Girnar.

There are 10,000 steps all the way to the top. The Jain temples are at 3000 steps, Amba temple at 5000 steps, Gorakhnath point at 7000 steps and Dattatreya peak (Dattaparvat) at 10,000 steps. Padukas of Lord Dattatreya have been installed at Dattaparvat.

Girnar is near Junagarh in the Saurashtra region of the Gujarat state. Junagarh has a railway station and is on the Rajkot-Dwarka route of Western Railway. Mount Girnar is known as Raivat Parvat in the Puranas. It takes 5-7 hrs to climb the 10,000 steps to the Dattaparvat. There are resting places along the way. For people who cannot climb *palakhi* (dolly) is available at a cost (depending upon a person's weight).

At Girnar Swami Samarth visited the temple of Devi Ambica. She asked him why he had left this main abode of his and where did he go. Swami Samarth replied that he was wandering on the earth for the benefit of people and that he had come there specifically to meet her. He also requested her blessings to be always with him. At this time he was known as Chanchalbharati.

Sevadas One Sevadas, an aspirant who met Swami Samarth said that because genuine yogis are not to be found in this Kaliyuga, he had come to Girnar to meet such yogis and experience the presence of the deities. Swami Samarth told him that Divine powers that are not affected by the boundaries of time and space always exist. But to meet them one must first raise one's spiritual level and become worthy of such experiences. This is possible only by making the mind pure. Company of saints and actions without desire for fruits helps to achieve this. True guru's grace also is necessary to realize God.

He advised Sevadas to surrender with all heart to Shri Narasimha Saraswati who was present on the Girnar Mountain. While Sevadas was listening to this his mind became clear, love for the Supreme sprang in

his heart and tears began to flow from his eyes. Once Swami Samarth saw that Sevadas had achieved the fitness he appeared before him in the form of Shri Dattatreya. This happened in the year 1853 AD. Many others also had their doubts cleared and given benediction. A little while later he accepted worship from all the devotees and during the rituals the Shri Dattatreya *Padukas* appeared in place of Swami Samarth's feet.

8.0 AMBEJOGAI

Swami Samarth then vanished from Girnar and appeared at Ambejogai in the erstwhile Nizam State, known for the temple of the goddess Ambejogai. Ambejogai has been the abode of many saints. Here a remarkable miracle was performed by him for saving his devotees. This story is as follows:

Swami Samarth’s behaviour here was that of a child. He mixed among the cowherds. Among them was a very pretty five year old girl who became attracted towards Swami Samarth. She used to chit-chat with Swami Samarth and give him food brought from home. Her poor parents, out of greed made a sneaky plan. They argued that in the girl would leave their house after marriage anyway so why not dress her as a boy and give her away to the local childless wealthy moneylender? It would surely benefit them in some way or other and the girl also would live the life of the rich. Then they dressed up the girl as a boy and took her in procession to the moneylender telling him that they had found this pretty boy who was fit to be only in his house. The moneylender thought this to be God’s grace and adopted the boy(?). The girl dressed as a boy gradually turned into a beautiful youth who was however always worried about her fraud getting exposed. The moneylender then thought of the boy’s marriage and arranged for a good bride. The date was fixed. But when the bride’s people came to apply turmeric to the bridegroom’s body as per the custom they were shocked to find that it was a girl’s and not a boy’s body before them. The moneylender complained to the king who punished the cowherds and passed a death sentence for the girl ordering that the executioners should take her to deep forest and execute her. Accordingly the executioners took the girl to the forest and made her sit on a rock. She requested for a last wish of meeting Swami Samarth. As soon as she got the permission she ran to where Swami Samarth was sitting and fell at his feet. Swami Samarth at once understood what the matter was and asked the moneylender to be called. He came with a group of people and saw the girl who was now a real boy by Swami Samarth’s grace without a trace of female attributes. The moneylender performed the marriage with great pomp. Several sons were born to this boy who developed into good and learned individuals. The boy himself told this story to Vamanbuwa when they met at the Kamandalutirtha at Girnar. Only a Siddhayogi could have performed such a miracle which is very similar to the story of Shikhandi in Mahabharata.

9.0 RAMESHWARAM

From Ambejogai Swami Samarth went to Rameshwaram in the south. When Swami Samarth arrived there the senior Purohit (priest) in charge of the worship had died and instead of the rights of worship going to his descendants some other persons had forcibly appropriated them. These people started giving trouble to pilgrims by charging exorbitant amounts for everything and abuse them if they did not comply. Finally people came together and on the basis of old documents made a complaint to the king and drove the usurpers away.

Clerk's child During this period Swami Samarth was quietly sitting in a state of blissful samadhi under a tree. A public institution that provided meals to public was situated near the tree. One clerk in the institution noted that Swami Samarth did not move from his position for three days. He approached Swami Samarth and humbly prayed to him that he would consider himself blessed if he would accept the food he would be sending. Seeing his humbleness Swami Samarth accepted a little food sent by the clerk every day.

The clerk was sixty years old and childless. Realizing that Swami Samarth was a Siddha, the clerk and his wife one day prayed insistently to be blessed with a son. Swami Samarth told him that if they insisted they would get a son but it would be better if he controlled his desires. The couple did not understand

what Swami Samarth meant. They got a son and from that time Swami Samarth vanished from there. The clerk continued to keep food under the tree but while earlier Swami Samarth would eat only a little food now the entire dish was being consumed. This created misgivings in the couple's minds.

One day they suddenly saw Swami Samarth in Rameshwaram temple. He seemed to be present everywhere both inside and outside the temple. The old couple was happy. They wanted to put their son at his feet but the son suddenly disappeared. When they called for him he said from the hiding place that he was afraid of the *Sanyasi*. Finally they forcibly brought him to Swami Samarth. The seven year old boy turned into a huge ugly monster and started entreating to Swami Samarth not to kill him and to liberate him. So saying the monster fell down lifeless. Swami Samarth then told the old couple that a spirit living on the tree used to eat the food and he took birth as their son but now he had liberated him. He then gave some ashes to apply to the body to make it turn back into a boy's body and instructed them to cremate it. The desire of the couple for a son did not go away however. Swami Samarth out of compassion blessed them with a son.

We see here a typical example of how in spite of the spiritual treasure like Swami Samarth on hand people like the clerk bother only about the materialistic aspects of life out of misguided beliefs like "Without a son one will not get liberation" fostered by *smritis* and how Swami Samarth fulfilled these desires out of compassion. It is true that one can find mostly only *arta* (distressed) and *artharhi* (desirous of wealth) devotees in this world as mentioned in the seventh Chapter of Dnyaneshwari.

There is a lake named Kotitirtha near Rameshwaram. As in Lake Narayan, here also the priests did not allow people to bathe unless they paid substantial money. Seeing this one day Swami Samarth went there to take bath the priests prevented him and asked for money. Swami Samarth argued that he was a sanyasi and where could he get money from? But the arrogant priest did not listen. Swami Samarth left saying "The thing for which a bath was desirable in this lake is no longer there" and left. The lake water developed foul odour and was full of worms.

Now nobody would take bath in the lake and that affected the income of the greedy priests. They tried all sorts of measures like *abhisheka* and mantras but nothing would help. Finally they went to Shringeri Shankaracharya who went into meditation and found that the reason was they had maltreated a sanyasi who was not an ordinary sanyasi but an avatar; they had under the influence of greed had forgotten simple courtesy and they should pray the sanyasi. Now the behaviour of the priests towards the public changed. As they improved the lake water also improved in quality. Then one day suddenly they saw Swami Samarth in Rameshwaram. The priests gathered around him and Swami Samarth asked, "How was your trip to Shringeri? Did you meet Shankaracharya?" The priests surrendered and Swami Samarth advised them to follow Shankaracharya advice.

10.0 RAJUR

After gracing many in Rameshwaram Swami Samarth came to Rajur in Beed district in erstwhile Nizam state (Now in Marathwada region of Maharashtra).

There was a decrepit Math in Rajur which Swami Samarth rejuvenated. He initiated many disciples there including one Lalbharati. He arranged for an annual government grant of one thousand rupees which gave some stability to the Math. One day Swami Samarth vanished from there and was seen at Pandharpur walking on the waters of river Chandrabhaga. From Pandharpur Swami Samarth went to Mangalwedhe. Here in Rajur the State grant was stopped by Nizam government after Swami Samarth's departure. Lalbharati and others were distressed. They searched for Swami Samarth and located him at Akkalkot. He arranged for the grant to be revived but warned Lalbharati that the funds should be used to only help the pilgrims and they should behave properly.

11.0 MANGALWEDHE

Swami Samarth appeared in Mangalwedhe in the year 1838 AD and stayed there for twelve years. (From now onwards his movements seem to be well documented). Mangalwedhe is located about 65 Km southeast of Solapur and about 25 Km south of Pandharpur.

Mangalwedhe is the place where Damaji, the great devotee of Vithoba (Pandharpur) lived in the fifteenth century. Damaji was in revenue service. During his tenure the region was afflicted by a famine for seven years from 1468 AD onwards. The kind Damaji could not bear to see people starving. On his own authority, he distributed food from the government granary to the starving poor. Damaji was arrested and asked to pay up for the used grains. An unknown person who gave his name as Vithu came and paid the money and had Damaji released. It was obvious that Shri Vithoba the deity of Pandharpur had come himself in person to save his devotee. Mangalwedhe is known for many other devotees also. Kanhopatra, the daughter of a prostitute is well known among them. Many bad elements including the king of Bedar tried to get her. But she did not want anything other than Vithoba. She has composed many devotional poems. She was forcibly taken away by the king but on the way she requested to be allowed to visit the Vithoba temple in Pandharpur and died leaving her body on the threshold of the sanctum sanctorum there. Her story proves the point made in Dnyaneshwari that when it comes to devotion God is attainable by anybody irrespective of his caste or gender.

Swami Samarth instead of coming into the town remained in the nearby forest. His behaviour was, like many accomplished yogis, sometimes like a child (*Balavritti*), sometimes like a mentally deranged person (*Unmattavritti*) and sometimes like a possessed person (*Pishacchavritti*). Whenever he entered the town, which was not often, he used to sit in some dirty place. He was indifferent to good and bad, clean and dirty, whether he was dressed or naked but he remained in a state of bliss.

Krishnambhat's cow Though a yogi in this state looks like a madman to common people there always are people who can feel their greatness. We have the example of Shri Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon whom Bankatlal and Damodarpant saw sitting naked in the street eating the leftover food thrown in the street. They recognized him as an accomplished yogi and served him, finally becoming his disciples. There was in Mangalwedhe a poor but well charactered Brahmin by name Krishnambhat Kapshikar. When he saw Swami Samarth he recognized him as an unusual person and bowing to him humbly requested to visit his home. Swami Samarth smiled because he knew that Krishnambhat was extremely poor but sincere and promised to visit him. Krishnambhat came home and told this to his wife who also felt happy. They waited for Swami Samarth to come. Suddenly they found Swami Samarth sitting on the front platform of their home. Krishnambhat came and stood before him performing a mental worship. Swami Samarth accepted the worship and asked smilingly, "This is all fine but what are you going to give me to eat?" Krishnambhat and his wife stood there with misty eyes because there was nothing in the house to offer. Swami Samarth again told them, "Why are you standing there? I am hungry. Go and get me something to eat." Both went inside and after some thinking Krishnambhat gave his wife a pot and told her to go out in town and get some milk quickly from somewhere. She went and returned empty handed. They came sadly to Swami Samarth and told him what had happened. Swami Samarth asked why they were going out when they had a cow in the house. The couple told him that the cow no longer gave milk. Swami Samarth first gave them advice on the Self-realization and then asked them to go and milk the cow. The cow began giving milk and Krishnambhat could offer milk to Swami Samarth. Soon the entire town knew the real capability of Swami Samarth. (Readers may remember the similar miracle by Shri Narasimha Saraswati before he entered Ganagapur.)

Janabai sees Vithoba There was a woman named Janabai belonging to the Shudra caste who was deeply devoted to Vithoba of Pandharpur. She used to visit Pandharpur every year on *Ashadh Ekadashi* day to see Vithoba and make her obeisance to Him. This is the time when all Vithoba devotees from all places converge to Pandharpur. The trip is called “*Vari*” and the maker of the trip is called a Varkari. In those days going to Pandharpur was not easy. There were no buses and no arrangements for meals on the way as are available today. People had to walk miles braving rain and sun. There were no public facilities, no

medical facilities and no inoculations against cholera which took its toll every year due to unhygienic conditions. People really risked their lives to visit Vithoba at Pandharpur but under the sedation of devotion people forgot all problems and marched ahead towards Vithoba engrossed in the singing His name.

This year there came heavy rains which brought floods. Journey to Pandharpur to meet Vithoba seemed impossible. Janabai started crying for she had never missed the annual visit. While she was thus lamenting from her heart there was a flash of lightning and she saw Swami Samarth sitting under a tree oblivious of the rain. She felt consoled and went near him. He noted her desperate state and asked her, "Do you think that Vithal is only at Pandharpur and nowhere else?" He then gave her spiritual advice and power to see Vithal within her. She started seeing Vithal everywhere. Swami Samarth then asked her to close her eyes and then open. When she closed the eyes Swami Samarth got up and stood before her with hands on the waist like Vithoba. When she opened her eyes she saw Vithal in person before her. *Swami Samarth brought to her the realization that the body is Pandharpur and the Soul residing in it is Vithal.* Thus she realized the formless Brahman. From then onwards she did not insist on going to Pandharpur. Instead she would go wherever Swami Samarth used to be at that time. Janabai must be considered to be really fortunate to have received guidance from such a Guru as Swami Samarth. How many people can be so fortunate? One must also ask, how many people are as deeply devoted as Janabai? It is the vibrations of devotion that reach Guru and God and not *bhajans* without feelings.

Golden snake Swami Samarth performed many miracles at Mangalwedhe. One Basappa saw Swami Samarth relaxing on a bed of thorns in the forest. Realizing that he was a great yogi Basappa became a devotee of Swami Samarth. He used to stay near him ignoring his wife who was starving and had therefore fallen ill. One day Swami Samarth took Basappa to a forest where he saw horrible snakes. He fell unconscious by fright. Swami Samarth brought him to senses and asked him to return home to his ailing wife taking as many snakes as he wanted. Basappa readily agreed to return because of the fear of the snakes but would not pick up any. Finally Swami Samarth picked up a snake, tied it in a piece of cloth and forced it on Basappa. Basappa ran home to his sick wife who opened the bundle and found a piece of pure gold.

Deo Mamaledar Though most people approached Swami Samarth for material benefits there were a few who came for spiritual benefits. Among such persons the name of Deo Mamaledar is well-known. His real name was Yashwant Mahadeo Bhosekar from Bhosegaon. He served Swami Samarth with deep devotion while at Mangalwedhe. He was holding the Government post of a Mamaledar (below a collector). He was known both for his spiritual level and for his charitable nature. Once, the district of Thane near Bombay was suffering from famine. People had no jobs and therefore no money to buy grains from government granaries. They began to die of starvation but Government was oblivious to the calamity. One day hundreds of starving persons thronged at Deo Mamaledar's office having heard about his kind nature. Deo Mamaledar, feeling pity for them, opened the government granary and distributed ten thousand rupees worth of grains among the starving masses who returned to their homes grateful to Deo Mamaledar. However the incident had its repercussions. One person by name Prabhu made a complaint about the incident to the Thane Collector who immediately came with police to audit the situation. Deo Mamaledar was called and the granary opened in his presence. Deo Mamaledar confessed that he had distributed the grains but since government was supposed to protect people and the need was immediate he had ignored the rules. But the Collector was not interested in all this philosophy. He wanted to be a most Obedient Servant of the Government. He ordered to audit the accounts and the cash in the safe. It turned out that everything was accounted for including the ten thousand rupees for the grains. The Collector who was a British person realized that Deo Mamaledar had Divine backing. Though he praised him Deo Mamaledar realized that the impersonal Government atmosphere was not congenial to his spiritual path and tendered his resignation.

A Muslim devotee A poor Muslim individual in Mangalwedhe who roamed around like a madman surviving only by begging, became a sincere of Swami Samarth. He used to fill his pipe with tobacco and make it ready to smoke. At that time Swami Samarth was camping in the meadow of one Mr Patwardhan.

Whenever Swami Samarth came to the town he served him in many other ways. Many days later Swami Samarth out of compassion kept his divine hand on his head and gave him (spiritual) Knowledge. The man later became an *auliya* i.e. a spiritual person of high attainment who is oblivious to his personal effects or behaviour. Though outwardly he behaved like a deranged person, internally he was immersed in the bliss of the Brahman. This shows that Swami Samarth used to give spiritual benefits to worthy persons.

Humbling Ramdasibuwa There was an egotistic chief of a Math at Chalambe near Mangalwedhe named Ramdasibuwa. He had a very high opinion about himself in spiritual matters. One day Swami Samarth went to the Math and after partaking of afternoon meals slept inside. Ramdasibuva waited for him to wake up and leave so that he could lock the Math and go about his business. But Swami Samarth continued to sleep. Finally in a fit of anger he locked the Math with Swami Samarth still sleeping inside and went to the town where he spent quite some time. He told his friends how he had locked Swami Samarth inside. On the way back however he was shocked to see Swami Samarth near the river. Other people also saw him and started questioning Ramdasibuwa. They all came to the Math to find it still locked but Swami Samarth missing from inside. People started ridiculing the chief and his spiritual achievements too. To prove that he had really locked Swami Samarth in Ramdasibuva brought a Vedic pundit Parshurambhat as witness. This changed the attitude of everybody who rushed to the river and prostrated before Swami Samarth. The pundit told Ramdasibuva that taking the name of God does not make one a devotee but being one with him to such an extent that ultimately it results into God taking God's name. This got rid of Ramdasibuva's ego.

12.0 IN MOHOL

Importance of moral behaviour The following story shows how particular Swami Samarth was about morals: Mr Ganesh Sohoni was a government official Mamledar rank in Mohol. Once there was a *kirtan* (discourse) in his house during the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations. Swami Samarth was also present. It was around midnight and though it was raining Swami Samarth suddenly walked out of the house. Mr. Sohoni followed entreating him to return but Swami Samarth refused declaring that his house was unclean and proceeded towards the forest. Sohoni persistently followed him for couple of miles. When he saw that Swami Samarth would not return he felt hopeless and asked Swami Samarth when he would be able to meet him. He was told "In the mango season" (in spring). Sohoni returned. The reason Swami Samarth has left was that Sohoni had kept a mistress in the house. But under the influence of lust Sohoni did not get rid of her. Sometime later (it was around 1851-52 AD) district collector, Sohoni's superior visited for inspection and having heard about his habit privately advised him to give up the mistress because it did not become a government officer like him. Sohoni replied that collector need not bother about it since it was a personal matter. Collector became annoyed and sometime later Sohoni was prosecuted. Though he was set free by court he had to lose his position and he went to live in Solapur. In the mango season Swami Samarth came to him with two mangoes, gave them to Sohoni and vanished. He got an equivalent job in Baroda after he gave up his mistress. Guru's instructions should be taken seriously because they are for your good and disobeying one's guru can be disastrous. Sohoni must be considered singularly fortunate that Swami Samarth did not forget him and met him as promised.

Gaveswami Swami Samarth was in Mohol for about five years. In Mohol there was a yogi named Gaveswami who had reached a high yogic level. He had practiced yoga for more than hundred and twenty-five years and lived in seclusion. His entire nature was purified and love was radiating from him. Only thing stopping him from liberation was the blessings of a true Guru. Swami Samarth went to him, saw his advanced state and sent him in the highest samadhi state and liberation.

Swami Samarth left Mohol and came to Solapur in about 1854-55. After spending couple of years in Solapur Swami Samarth came to Akkalkot which was to be last of his abodes in this lifetime.

13.0 EVENTS AT SOLAPUR

After coming to Solapur in about 1854-55, Swami Samarth stayed in a Shri Dattatreya temple. He used to sit in a corner immersed in the bliss of the Brahman. His only activity used to be playing with marbles, throwing them here and there. People who came to the temple used to ignore him as a madman but one day a person named Chintopant Tol noticed him and felt intuitively that he must be a Siddha. Just then Swami Samarth said loudly, "What business is it of yours whether I am a Siddha or not?" Chintopant realised that this person was a mind reader. At once Swami Samarth remarked, "What does it matter whether I am a mind reader or not?" Now Chintopant was certain that this was no madman but a Siddha. He went to him, touched his feet and requested him to visit his home. Swami Samarth accepted. Chintopant then invited him for meals which also he accepted. Chintopant was extremely happy.

Swami Samarth eats at Chintopant's house Swami Samarth came to Chintopant one day as promised. Chintopant bowed before him, seated him on the best seat and went inside to take bath prior to meals. Just before he was coming out to take Swami Samarth in for meals, one Dajiba Sohoni came to him and whispered to him that Swami Samarth did not bother about the prescribed rules of purity and touchability; he touched anybody and anything and ate with persons of any caste; it would be against rules of Dharma to sit in the same row as Swami Samarth for meals. (In the middle of nineteenth century caste rules were very strict, unlike today). As a result of this brainwashing Chintopant decided to arrange Swami Samarth's seat at right angles to that of the Brahmins' row as rules permit. With this thought in mind he came to take Swami Samarth inside. Swami Samarth got up and began to leave the house saying that Chintopant had doubts in his mind and therefore he would not eat in his house. Chintopant realized he had made a mistake. After making entreaties he somehow managed to be forgiven and then Swami Samarth ate at his house. After this incident Swami Samarth often visited Chintopant's house and had meals.

Chintopant's son is late in office One day Swami Samarth came to Chintopant for meals. Chintopant gave him bath, worshipped him and prayed to him to come for meals but that day Swami Samarth kept sitting quietly and would not get up. Chintopant's son Vishnupant was serving as a clerk in the collector's office and had to reach his office by ten O'clock. Chintopant was worried as the hour approached ten in the morning. The Collector Mr. Goldfinch as well as his Deputy Mr. Hanmantrao Pitambar were very strict about punctuality. Chintopant therefore suggested that Vishnupant should eat and proceed to office. But Vishnupant was also an ardent devotee of Swami Samarth and refused to eat unless Swami Samarth ate first. Swami Samarth finally got up for meals at eleven. After his meals Vishnupant went to office with a pounding heart worrying about the dressing down he would get from his superiors. He reached office, removed his coat and went to the head-clerk Mr. Deorao to beg his pardon for being late. Mr. Deorao was surprised. He asked, "What pardon? You have already signed the muster today even earlier than me." Vishnupant's eyes were wet with feelings of gratitude for Swami Samarth, for he understood that this was his play. When others knew about it they too developed a great reverence for Swami Samarth.

Chintopant retired from service shortly afterwards but because of his experience and capability Shahajiraje Bhonsale, the King of Akkalkot state took him in his service. Thus Chintopant moved to Akkalkot from Solapur. He requested Swami Samarth to come with him to Akkalkot but he refused saying that "It is a hot summer at Akkalkot. I will come after rains."

Swami Samarth remained in Solapur for some time during which he blessed many in both worldly and spiritual matters. Among them was a north Indian Brahmin named Mukund who was a good *sadhak*. After Swami Samarth gave him proper advice he began observing complete silence and was known as Mounibuva. He reached the Siddha state and many benifitted by his powers.

14.0 AKKALKOT-THE LAST ABODE

As the number of devotees increased Swami Samarth decided to leave Solapur. In the meantime Shahajiraje Bhonsale died and Malojirao succeeded him to the throne. Akkalkot received good rains after the Deepavali festival. Now in about 1856 AD, Chintopant once more requested Swami Samarth to come to

Akkalkot and this time he accepted. While he was coming to Akkalkot with Swami Samarth on a horse, Chintopant was called away by the Collector. He left Swami Samarth sitting under a tree leaving a servant in attendance. When Chintopant returned he found a frightened servant and no sign of Swami Samarth. The servant told him that Swami Samarth had left saying that nobody owns him. Chintopant was worried stiff but was relieved to find Swami Samarth playing like a child in the Khandoba temple near Akkalkot. Chintopant requested him to come home but Swami Samarth said, "No! My home is elsewhere." After many unsuccessful entreaties Chintopant bowed and left. It was the fifth of the month of Ashwin bright fortnight of 1779 by Shalivahan calendar (1857 AD) when Swami Samarth first entered Akkalkot. He lived here for nearly 22 years in the final phase of his life until his samadhi in 1878 AD.

15.0 ASPIRANTS BY THOUSANDS

Thousands of people visited Swami Samarth at Akkalkot and received blessings. Most people sought material benefits but a small minority were true seekers. We shall be acquainted with both types a little later. Many of these seekers were given *Padukas* (sandals) and sent away with instructions to install and worship them. Thus we see a number of Maths of Swami Samarth at several places in Maharashtra. These Maths are really like temples visited daily by hundreds of people.

Math and temple There is a basic difference between temple of a deity and temple or Math of a saint. A deity considered celestial is held in awe and even fear by the devotees always creating a subtle barrier between the deity and the devotee. An ordinary devotee of a deity sees and worships only the idol or a picture of the deity. There is no direct communication between the two unless the devotee has reached a very high spiritual level. Thus the devotee performs the worship and walks away having the satisfaction of having done his duty towards the deity or towards God

In the case of a saint however the fact that he was a human being before samadhi and was in personal contact with the devotees creates a bond instead of a barrier. A sense of love, of informality and approachability, the faith (and often some experience) that the Guru really looks after their welfare strengthens this bond. This is what has happened in the case of Swami Samarth. His Maths are visited constantly by sincere devotees. And when a devotee who never even saw Swami Samarth develops such a bond imagine how strong the bonds must have been when devotees were in personal contact with him while he was alive in his body and actually talked to them, engulfing them in his vibrations of love and compassion. Even Swami Samarth's anger was considered by the devotees like a boon.

The events in Solapur and Akkalkot have been well documented and published, mostly in Marathi. The entire collection will spread easily over three hundred pages. Therefore only a few incidents have been selected here for presentation.

Mini-biographies of some prominent disciples of Swami Samarth will be presented in the next part: **Disciples of Swami Samarth**.

16.0 THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

No more orthodoxy From now on there seems to be basic change in the type of devotees who came to Swami Samarth. During the time of Shripad Shrivallabh there is no record of any Muslim visiting him. In the case of Shri Narasimha Saraswati the only Muslim to visit him was the king used to be washer-man in his earlier birth. Shri Narasimha Saraswati prohibited Sayandeo from serving under or even saluting any Muslim. His actions were in keeping with the need of those times. Shri Narasimha Saraswati must have realized the basic enmity between the Muslims and Hindus, the difference in the way of life and thinking of the two and how Hindus, especially upper caste Brahmins had to serve compulsorily or reluctantly the ruling Muslims and in the course of time deviated from the orthodox way of life.

In the regime of Swami Samarth times had changed. The Muslims were no longer rulers except in smaller states. They were now subdued and the British ruled India. We see the third avatar of Shri Dattatreya mixing with one and all irrespective of their caste or religion and becoming unpopular among the orthodox

for it. He did not impose ban on serving the British or learning their language. His grace extended not only to Muslims some of whom became his disciples but to the British as well, i.e. those who approached him for his grace. This was again in keeping with the times.

Adjusting to Geography When we examine the history of mankind we always see that whoever came as messenger of God always preached whatever conformed to those times. The changes he proposed were always to the religious practices or concepts prevalent in his own times and for which he had to suffer the wrath of the contemporary rigid orthodoxy. But this world undergoes constant changes because of which changing natural, political or social environment the teachings can become incongruous. If the religion spreads to geographical areas far from the place of the birth of the religion then also the religious practices become incongruous. The practices sometimes involve hygiene (like taking bath or cleaning hands) and diet (like eating certain kinds of meat and vegetables) and create problems. These practices may not have anything to do with the tenets of the religion but just rules forced on the followers by priests. We can find instances of this in the Judaic religions (i.e. Jewish, Christian and Muslim) and become weapons for the so called fundamentalists to attack the public. In Hindu and Jain religions also there religious rules involving hygiene and food which while easy to follow in a tropical Indian climate, would be impossible to follow completely for a common man in the Western temperate climates with freezing temperatures and snow and limited capability of growing vegetables. Geography cannot adjust to man, man and hence religion has to adjust to geography.

If this does not happen then the religion becomes inconsistent with the surrounding environment bringing many contradictions in its practice. This can give rise to fundamentalism which upholds ancient values and practices and create dissent within the society. More likely, another messenger of God comes and starts a new religion to fit the new environment. In the present case we have an avatar of Shri Dattatreya who is not only tolerant to Muslims but even has disciples among them in keeping up with the times. We notice that stress on ritualistic correctness has given way to spiritual attainment.

17.0 INITIAL DAYS

Nirabai's laddoo Hearing that Swami Samarth had arrived in Akkalkot and was at the Khandoba temple many persons came to meet him. Chintopant Tol also came and introduced them. Among them was a very pious person named Pandurang Puranik whose invitation for meals Swami Samarth accepted. Puranik's wife Nirabai very devotedly welcomed swami Samarth with garlands etc and placed a dish of snacks before him. He took a *laddoo* from the dish and gazed at eat instead of eating it. People were frightened lest they have committed some blunder. When Nirabai pleaded that he should begin eating Swami Samarth asked her to bring the part of the laddoo she had held back and kept on the stove. What had happened is that thinking that swami Samarth may not eat the whole laddoo and it would go waste she had kept half on the stove and given only half to Swami Samarth. Everybody was amazed at how Swami Samarth could know about this; Swami Samarth ate happily and blessed the couple. In a way he suggested that one should be free from the tendency to accumulate.

Baba Sabnis and Manik Prabhu At this time one Baba Sabnis came there and prostrated before Swami Samarth. He said I had your *darshan* at Maniknagar when you had promised to give *darshan* at Akkalkot in future. That has come true. People were astonished to hear this.

Manik Prabhu (1817-1865) is considered as the fourth avatar of Dattatreya (See Part VI). His domain of activity was the erstwhile Muslim ruled Nizam state. The context of the above incidence is as follows: Many aspirants came to Manik Prabhu some for their material difficulties and a lesser number for spiritual guidance. To the latter class belonged one Yadnyeshwar Vaidya Ahmadnagarkar *alias* Bapu Dikshit who stayed at Maniknagar to serve Manik Prabhu. This Bapu Dikshit had a nephew named Vishwanath Vaidya who also lived there along with his friend Baba Sabnis. These were all religious minded honest persons of clean mentality. They used to sing *Bhajans* to musical accompaniment before Manik Prabhu in the evenings.

Once, while Dattatreya bhajans were in progress there was a flash of bright light that almost blinded the people present. Then Swami Samarth appeared accompanied by two *sanyasis*. Manik Prabhu rushed forward, made obeisance to Swami Samarth and seated him respectfully on the highest seat there. He seated the other two sanyasis also on other seats. Sometime later Manik Prabhu told Baba Sabnis that the great Sanyasi was Swami Samarth and will shortly come to live in Akkalkot for benefitting people. He told Vishwanath Vaidya that Swami Samarth was Dattatreya himself and was his (Vishwanath's) Guru. Also that his youngest brother Vamanrao Vaidya would be a close devotee of Swami Samarth and rise to high spiritual level and spread the Dattatreya Sampradaya. Swami Samarth and Manik Prabhu blessed them. The visiting sanyasis stayed with Manik Prabhu in exclusion of all others the whole night. Next morning Swami Samarth, by mental communication solved all the doubts of Baba Sabnis. The visitors then left. Manik Prabhu instructed Baba Sabnis to go to Akkalkot and inform people about the forthcoming arrival there of Swami Samarth. Vishwanath Vaidya also returned home to Vamori and told the good news to Vamanrao giving him the garland worn by Swami Samarth.

Kings's obeisance Swami Samarth then went and stayed in the royal Gnash temple. People started flocking there to have his *darshan.* The news reached the ears of king Maloji of Akkalkot. He came to the temple with garlands, coconut etc. along with his minister Dajiba Bhonsale to meet Swami Samarth and after worshipping him he surrendered to him. Sami Samarth graced both by giving the garland to Dajiba and ochre cloth to the King. The 22- year stay started.

18.0 CHOLAPPA

Smokes Empty Chillum Swami Samarth soon left the temple and camped at a place called "Phatak" (Gate) near the village border which used to be marked by a flag. He stayed there for three days without eating. On the fourth day a Muslim *risaldar* (Chief of cavalry unit) by name Ahmadali saw him and thought he was some mad person. Eager to have some fun at his expense Ahmadali took an empty chillum, put some burning coal in it and asked, "Maharaj, do you smoke?" Swami Samarth took the chillum without a word and started puffing at it. Smoke started coming out of the chillum. Ahmadali who was laughing was shocked into silence. He was now convinced that this mad looking person was some great yogi. He now became a devotee. He enquired about him and learnt that he had not eaten for three days. Feeling unhappy he arranged for his meals at the house of a Brahmin who lived nearby called Cholappa. When Cholappa kept the dish of food before Swami Samarth he asked Ahmadali to touch it. Due to the untouchability taboos of those days he was reluctant to do so but Swami Samarth told him smilingly not to be afraid and to hold the dish in hand. Swami Samarth was very happy when he touched it and broke his three days fast.

As mentioned earlier Swami Samarth never differentiated between Hindus and Muslims. He used to visit temples as well as mosques and Dargas (mausoleums). The fight between Hindus and Muslims had now given place to their common fight against the British who were trying to bring the entire Indian subcontinent under their rule.

In Cholappa's house When Swami Samarth saw Cholappa he at once said, "Cholappa, have you forgotten me? You are the son of Ramchandra Saraf, a Brahmin and my dear devotee." After meals Swami Samarth went to stay at Cholappa's house.

Cholappa used to live with his wife and two sons. Swami Samarth used worship them .to give lots of trouble to the family by behaving like a madman. He used to feed the grains in the house to cows or give it away in alms to beggars and mendicants. He would urinate anywhere in the house. But Cholappa firmly believed that Swami Samarth was an avatar of Shri Dattatreya and tolerated everything. Once Swami Samarth left the house but Cholappa brought him back.

After testing Cholappa for a long time swami Samarth set out for a village named Basapur couple of miles away. Cholappa followed him even after swami Samarth angrily told him not to do so advising him to go back home and lead a good family life. But Cholappa refused saying that he would rather leave his house

and family but not Swami Samarth's feet. Seeing the deep devotion Swami Samarth threw his sandals (*padukas*) at him instructing him to worship them regularly. Cholappa was full of joy when he received the *Padukas*.

Cholappa began to worship the *Padukas* regularly and soon sick people in the neighbourhood began to get dreams in which they were told to go to Cholappa's house where the Padukas were installed and their visits would be gainful. These *Padukas* are still being worshipped in Cholappa Math at Akkalkot by his descendants.

Swami Samarth now became one of the family. But being poor Cholappa could just manage to feed the family and Swami Samarth. Later he received a regular monthly grant of five rupees from the king. In the course of time Cholappa became greedy and started fleecing Swami Samarth's visitors one way or other. Later a woman named Sunderabai, about whom we shall read later, came to serve Swami Samarth and undertook to feed him (for often Swami Samarth required feeding like a child) and look after his comforts. In the course of time she became very powerful but greedy. She managed to remove Cholappa from the service of Swami Samarth by influencing the queen of Akkalkot.

According to Kelkarbuva's *Bakhar,* as Cholappa accumulated wealth his services to Swami Samarth became lax. One day Swami Samarth picked up a cloth lying about and put knots in it to make it into a begging bowl. He then said "Allakh" (as Nath yogis say) and kept the cloth open. People put cash into it. In no time rupees one hundred and twenty-five were collected. He gave it to Cholappa saying, "Cholya, take this. Now I do not owe you anything anymore." Cholappa had until then collected cash material worth about sixty thousand rupees in which probably rupees one hundred and twenty-five were short to complete a round sum. Shortly after this, by royal decree it was ordered that a clerk and two policemen would supervise and keep account of the offerings and a committee would overlook the procedure and spend the collections for maintenance as needed. From that time Cholappa and Sunderbai lost their special position and were treated like any other *sevekaris*.

Swami Samarth did not see Cholappa when he died. He was highly devoted to Swami Samarth up to the last but his greed took its toll. Swami Samarth loved him like a father and when he died the sorrow was reflected in Swami Samarth's face. When asked by the queen of Akkalkot he said that the sorrow was like the separation between persons who were father and son for seven generations.

19.0 REBELLION OF 1857

After coming to Akkalkot, Swami Samarth began to play a strange game. He used to bring sticks and arrange its pieces like soldiers at a parade. He would arrange threads of the blanket similarly. When asked he would say he was making platoons. Soon the 1857 war between the British and the deposed Peshwas and other rulers started in which British won. But Swami Samarth knew about the forthcoming war quite in advance.

Vasudeo Balwant Phadke The well-known revolutionary Vasudeo Balwant Phadke was a keen devotee of Swami Samarth. He came to Swami Samarth sometime in 1857 with a sword and requested him to touch the sword and present it to him so that with its strength he can fight the British. Swami Samarth was very happy at his words but his face showed a touch of sadness. Vasudeo Balwant waited for Swami Samarth to give him the sword but Swami Samarth called a nearby servant and asked him to take the sword and keep it on the nearby tree. Vasudev Balwant understood the implication, took the sword and left. That was not yet ripe for such revolutions. Swami Samarth already knew what the outcome of the 1857 revolution would be and he also knew that fighting against the British was beyond the capability of a single person like Vasudeo Balwant however high his ideals may be.

20.0 SOLACE TO ALL

Swami Samarth was very compassionate but he did not tolerate dishonesty, hypocrisy or immorality and nobody could hide them from him because he was omniscient. He would be nasty and abusive in even

vulgar language to such people but once they repented and surrendered he would go all the way to help them and fulfill their desires. Many of his kind actions have been recorded but that would be a very small fraction of the total. What are reported here is a small fraction of even those.

As mentioned earlier very few persons came to Swami Samarth for spiritual gains. Most came for their materialistic difficulties. Some wanted a son, some wanted increase in their wealth, some wanted relief from their illnesses and many came to display their own knowledge and to criticize Swami Samarth for his unconventional behaviour as regards the observance of the caste system. All benefitted by their visits. Many self-important pundits were humbled but received Swami Samarth's grace.

To take some example many came for gaining eyesight. Swami Samarth told different medicines to different people, and what were these medicines? One person was asked to put cat's milk in the eyes, another was asked put horse urine and a third elephant urine. All were cured. What worked was Swami Samarth's power, the medicines were nominal. One got his sight even after his eyes were touched by a flower from outside. One cannot look for medical explanations here.

People came to cure leprosy and leucoderma, abdominal pains and other afflictions. Swami Samarth gave strange prescriptions and tasks and if carried with devotion they would get cured. Swami Samarth even diverted death and revived dead persons as an exception for saints normally do not interfere with course of nature.

Many such instances in the pre-Akkalkot phase have already been presented earlier. A few of these incidents and of course those incidents involving spiritual aspirants at Akkalkot are related below.

Death transferred to bull There was a person named Babasaheb Jadhav in Akkalkot. Swami Samarth knew that time for his death had come. He called him and said, "Eh Kumbhar (Potter, Swami Samarth used to call many people by that name.), message (of death) has come in your name." Jadhav understood what was meant and was frightened. Clasping Swami Samarth's feet he said that he wished to continue to serve him. Swami Samarth felt pity for him and said loudly to somebody, obviously the messengers of death, "Go there!", pointing to a bull grazing nearby. The bull at once fell dead and Jadhav continued to live for some more years.

There are many instances of Swami Samarth saving lives. Normally saints do not interfere with natural course of events but sometimes they do it for specific reasons. This Jadhav once tried to save a person named Ravanna from snakebite by keeping Swami Samarth's shoes on his head without permission from him. Swami Samarth who was sleeping at that time suddenly got up, threw away all his clothes and was very angry at Jadhav, abusing him left and right. Probably because the sanctity of the shoes had to be kept he asked him to shout in Ravanna's ears loudly calling him by name. After some time Ravanna woke up as if from a deep sleep. There are other instances also when Swami Samarth revived a dead person.

21.0 EQUALITY TO ALL

King is slapped Swami Samarth who was Brahman personified, did not like hypocrisy, untruth and other undesirable attributes. He did not spare anybody who showed these undesirable qualities and was very blunt about it irrespective of whether the person was rich or poor. What mattered to him was devotion. He was totally fearless.

Once, Malojiraje Bhonsale the king of Akkalkot came to meet Swami Samarth. He was riding on an elephant with all the royal splendour, wearing expensive jewellery. But Swami Samarth did not like this exhibition. When Malojiraje came to him to bow and was keeping his head on his feet, Swami Samarth slapped him hard on face with such a force that the royal bejewelled cap was thrown ten feet away. Malojiraje stood stunned rubbing his cheek. Swami Samarth was enraged and shouted, "You may be great in your house. Why do you bring that greatness here? I make Chess kings like you every day."

Malojiraje continued to visit Swami Samarth every Thursday. But he used to come in a simple dress and the palanquin in which he came was now kept far away and out of sight of Swami Samarth. Though a devotee of swami Samarth his reign in Akkalkot was not good. People were unhappy and a time came when the British expelled him from Akkalkot. Not that the British officers who ruled the kingdom were not any better. Maloji was reinstated later.

Some more tales about the king Malojiraje's devotion to Swami Samarth had worldly motives. He wanted to be blessed with a son. At the time of the first delivery of the queen people asked Swami Samarth whether it would be a boy or a girl. Swami Samarth said, "Bring bangles." This signified a daughter and it was a daughter this time. Second time Swami Samarth went and sat near the stove indicating it was again a girl. Third time however he said, "Fire the cannon." This time it was a son.

Swami Samarth always used to speak with short remarks using a mixture of Hindi and Marathi often sounding like riddles which had to be interpreted. With practice the persons living in his company could interpret his utterances or actions and advise the visitors accordingly.

Dead mouse revived One day Swami Samarth suddenly went to the palace. The king learnt of his arrival and hurriedly received him. Later, both sat on the swing facing the worship room. The *purohit* (priest) in charge of worship was at that time preparing sandal paste needed for the worship by rubbing sandalwood on stone. Just then a mouse came and started nibbling at the ghee (clarified butter) kept nearby for wetting lamp wicks. The *purohit* was enraged at this and threw the sandalwood piece at the mouse killing it. Elated, the *purohit* picked up the mouse by the tail and came out for throwing it away. Swami Samarth saw him and asked for the mouse. Taking the mouse in his hand he made it pass through the rings of the swing a few times and then keeping it on his palm said, "Go, child!" and the mouse, now alive, jumped and ran away. Everyone was aghast at this miracle.

Swami Samarth sees king on deathbed Malojiraje was highly devoted to Swami Samarth. He fell ill and he knew death was approaching. He was constantly thinking about Swami Samarth and used to tell everybody to arrange for him to meet him. But Swami Samarth did not come to the palace for nearly a fortnight. But when Malojiraje was about to die he suddenly entered the palace and went to the king who died with his eyes fixed on Swami Samarth.

22.0 DOUBTS, INSINCERITY AND SINCERITY

Swami Samarth did not like hypocrisy and insincerity. He used to ridicule and sometimes punish such people. On the other hand he appreciated sincerity and rewarded it. A few examples are given here in this context.

Fruits of petty greed Swami Samarth used to visit any place or house as pleased him, come sun or rain. One day he went early in the morning to the house of a Brahmin named Ganpatrao Joshi. Ganpatrao was very happy. He gave Swami Samarth bath and dressed him in his yellow silk cloth. Performing his worship in the traditional way with sandal paste, *kumkum* etc. he offered him food and kept his head on Swami Samarth's feet. Just then a thought entered his mind that after leaving his house Swami Samarth might give away his new yellow silk cloth. Swami Samarth read his thoughts and at once removed the cloth from his body and handing it over to Ganpatrao left his house without any clothes on. Joshi tried a lot to make Swami Samarth come back but he said, "You doubted. Now I shall not eat at your house." Just then another person named Tatya Vaidya came to know about this and invited Swami Samarth to come to his house. Swami Samarth judged the depth of his faith and had meals with him.

Stone and mattress are same to a yogi Once Swami Samarth was lying down on a cushion. A Puranik (one who gives discourses on Puranas) saw it and remarked why Sadhus (saints) need luxuries like cushions. A month passed. One day Swami took the Puranik for a walk to the nearby village. Towards evening he started climbing a hill with the Puranik accompanying him, The Puranik began hinting that they should return, but Swami ignored his suggestions, went to the top and spread a cloth on a stone and re-

laxed. The Puranik was worried and frightened because it was cold, dark and he did not have any warm clothes with him. Finally he confessed that he can no longer tolerate the cold and started praying to Swami Samarth who asked him, “So how is the soft cushion?” The Puranik remembered what he had said a month ago and realized that for a yogi, cushion and cold stone are all same. He begged for forgiveness.

Swami Samarth was offered all luxuries by his devotees but his attitude was always dispassionate.

Fraudulent Sadhus Once a person in the garbs of a follower of Kabirpanth sect came to Akkalkot. He used to go around in the streets singing devotional songs with a *veena* in hand. Gullible passers-by were bowing to the saint. Swami Samarth was sitting near the gate of Mr. Ganapatrao Joshi (mentioned earlier). When the saint (!) was passing by Swami Samarth uttered aloud a line of the song making a vulgar sign to him and started laughing loudly. That gave a hint to the devotees present that the saint was a bogus person. They trailed him and found that it was really so and that he was living with a married woman who had eloped with him. The saint(!) immediately left the town.

Five demons Once while Swami Samarth was sitting in the house of Mr. Deshmukh one Shivubai brought a small blind boy and told him that the boy had become blind since the time of his thread ceremony. She requested for some remedy. Swami Samarth told her, “Wait. Five demons are coming to test me. The boy will get back his sight at that time.” Just then five dark skinned large bellied Vaishnav Brahmins came with shawls wrapped on their shoulders speaking a mixture of Sanskrit and Kannada. They came and bowed to Swami Samarth who called the blind boy and said, “Ganesh, come here and tell loudly the questions in the minds of these darkies and also their answers.” The boy humbly said, “Maharaj, what can I tell? I do not know anything.” Swami Samarth removed the string of beads from his own neck and put it in the boy's neck. He took a marigold flower and touched the boy's eyes with it. The boy suddenly got up and started reciting the thoughts of the five Brahmins. The Brahmins were shamefaced. Swami Samarth said to their chief, “You came to test me because I eat from anybody's hand without bothering about the caste. You slandered me and tried to test me but your mother had illegitimate relations with many Muslims and you yourself are born from a Muslim named Imambaksh.” The Chief was shocked and ashamed. He begged forgiveness. The boy regained his sight. This incident was watched by Vamanbuva who has related it in Guruleelamrit as it happened.

Ego of Sankeshwar Shankaracharya Once Shankaracharya of Sankeshwar Math came to Akkalkot along with his paraphernalia. King Malojiraje arranged for their hospitality. Shankaracharya was made to seat on a throne and worshipped after which all people, which included learned *shastris* and *pundits,* sat for meals. Swami Samarth was not invited but he came with Cholappa to watch the ceremony. Nobody even offered a seat to Swami Samarth except an old Brahmin who got up and taking Swami Samarth by his hands seated him for meals. This caused a stir among the rest of the Brahmins who began to whisper that this sanyasi went and ate anywhere and with anybody and that he should not be in the row of Brahmins. When the meals were about to start the Brahmins saw that their food was full of worms. They were wondering about this strange happening when the old Brahmin said that this has happened because Shri Dattatreya has been shown disrespect. Hearing this Shankaracharya came down from his high seat to Swami Samarth and prayed for forgiveness. He said that Swami Samarth was actually the world Guru and he should occupy the high seat. Swami Samarth abused him left and right and said, “Yes, I am a disgraced sanyasi. But three *Shastris* who are with you are born from a Muslim. Ask about it to them and to their mother. How did you permit them to sit with you for meals? Does one become a sanyasi just by shaving one's head? Does learning *shastras* make one immune from caste rules?” The said *shastris* were full of shame and they came and prostrated before Swami Samarth begging for pardon. Swami Samarth now felt compassion and the food now became normal.

Even minor deities are not spared Deities we worship are some kind of powers which help to fulfill devotees’ desires when propitiated. Deities like Shri Dattatreya, Shiva, Vishnu and Durga are propitiated for spiritual as well as material goals. Several other deities are propitiated for material goals. How this hap-

pens is something we do not know but the experience about it is positive. Along with good powers there are also evil powers which are to be avoided. There seem to be some minor powers too which local people especially in rural areas worship and propitiate, sometimes with sacrificial offerings. Swami Samarth used to be scornful of such deities.

There used to be such a deity by name Ganadevi in the royal garden at Akkalkot. If a child or woman passed nearby in the afternoon or evening it used to give them trouble (probably by affecting their minds) and would not leave them unless offerings of a chicken and coconut was given. (Women and children are believed to be more prone to such afflictions). The deity was represented by a stone smeared with red oxide. Swami Samarth would go and pass urine on it or even defecate on it. Slowly the deity lost its importance and people finally ignored it altogether.

Respect for sincerity Swami Samarth respected sincerity as much as he detested hypocrisy. Matebuva from Pune was a noted Vedanta philosopher who gave discourses (*Kirtan*) to elucidate the difficult topic of Vedanta philosophy. He was highly devoted to Swami Samarth and in turn Swami Samarth also held him in high respect. Matebuva once performed a “Bhagwat Saptaha” (reading of the entire Bhagwat book in one week). Swami Samarth attended it throughout which was a unique event. Once there was a discourse in the royal garden and people were completely engrossed in it. Swami Samarth was also attending it. During the discourse Matebuva asked, “Whose feet are capable of taking us across this ocean of worldly life towards liberation?” At once Swami Samarth lowered his right foot. Overcome with love and emotion Matebuva ran to Swami Samarth and held that foot to his heart. He said aloud, “Really these are the feet which are capable of liberating.” Just then Swami Samarth lowered his other foot also which Balappa, another devotee and disciple held. (We shall read more about Balappa later.)

Sanyasi sees Shri Dattatreya Once a Sanyasi who was a dedicated devotee of Shri Dattatreya came to Akkalkot. Swami Samarth realizing his deep desire to see Shri Dattatreya changed his form to that of Shri Dattatreya. The Sanyasi was thrilled to see the ochre dressed effulgent form and his emotions had no bounds. His eyes closed but when he opened them it was Swami Samarth standing before him smiling pleasantly,

Rider on white horse One day Swami Samarth was playing like a child under the oudumber tree in Cholappa’s compound, using the brass face masks of the deities in the worship room to scoop out grains from a bin and putting them back. While this play was going on, a person riding a white horse tried to enter Cholappa’s house through its small door. The horse got stuck blocking the path. He had come to meet Swami Samarth but was helpless because the horse could not forward or backward. People gathered to see the fun. Just then the rider heard Swami Samarth’s voice from inside asking, “Where are the *Pedhas*? The horse will not move until you bring them.” The horse rider then told the people gathered there that he was afflicted with severe abdominal pains which no medicines or even mantras could cure. He went to Narsobawadi and performed many Gurucharitra Saptahas (ritual reading of entire Gurucharitra in one week). He made a vow one day that if he got a divine vision of Guru (Narasimha Saraswati) then he would offer one and a quarter rupees worth of *pedhas*. One day Shri Narasimha Saraswati came in his dream and told him that, “I am now staying in Akkalkot for the benefit of people. Go there immediately and your work will be done.” Because I was very weak I bought this new horse. After performing Rudrabhisheka Puja of the *padukas* and making a vow that after I get well I shall offer meals to people I rushed here on the horse and was guided to this house, but I left behind the parcel of *pedhas*. You have heard now that Swami Samarth already knows about all this and is asking me to bring the *pedhas*. People were very happy to know that Swami Samarth was Shri Narasimha Saraswati himself. Just then somebody handed the rider the parcel of *pedhas*. The horse then moved backward to clear the entrance. The rider went to Cholappa’s house and had Swami Samarth’s *darshan*. He stood with folded hands before Swami Samarth who called him near and touched his stomach with the brass mask. At once the abdominal pains vanished. Such was the compassion and omniscience of Swami Samarth.

The story of Radha Radha was a well-known dancer very proud of her beauty. She heard of Swami Samarth and one day visited him with the intention of testing him through enticement. Swami Samarth was sitting with his devotees and *sevekaris* (servers). Vamanbuva was also present. She bowed to Swami Samarth and sat near him. Her thoughts changed as she watched the effulgence of Swami Samarth. The woman who had made several men dance round her now became humble before this great personality. Swami Samarth looked at her and asked, “Radha, what is the difference between man and woman?” She replied, “Maharaj, there is a difference and therefore we discriminate between man and woman.” Swami Samarth asked, “What is the difference?” At this Radha felt too shy to utter the difference publicly and kept quiet. But when Swami Samarth insisted and finally she said shyly, “Women have breasts etc. which men do not have.” Swami Samarth started laughing. He said, “Radha, now go. You do not have anything more than men. Donate your special feminine organs to this Brahmin here.” Radha left and by the time she reached home her breasts became flat. She became a staunch devotee of Swami Samarth.

23.0 SUNDERABAI

There is saying in Marathi that darkness looms below a lamp. The devotees who stayed in the company of Swami Samarth lived as servers to serve him in various ways and get blessed. Very few people however really desired spiritual gains from Swami Samarth. Most servers lived for the free food and other perks available there. Most people came to Swami Samarth keeping in mind material gains like wealth, success, children or cure from illness. Even among this type there were people who used the situation to make money in a shameful way. We have seen how Cholappa fell prey to greed. The worst example was that of Sunderabai a woman who had the best opportunity to serve Swami Samarth but wasted it by using her proximity to Swami Samarth for petty personal gains. In the end she was driven out forcibly and dishonourably.

Sunderabai came to Swami Samarth from Solapur with the intention of getting cured of a foot affliction and continued to stay with him as a server. Later she took up Cholappa’s duties like bathing Swami Samarth, dressing him, feeding him, taking him for toilet etc. with Cholappa’s permission. Cholappa gave her the permission in spite of Swami Samarth’s warning him that she will eliminate him. In the course of time she took control to such an extent that even meeting Swami Samarth required her permission. With her knack of sweet talk she even poisoned the Akkalkot queen's mind against Cholappa and managed to remove him from Swami Samarth's service. She used to demand money from devotees who wished to see Swami Samarth or extract money, food, sweets and gifts from them pretending that she was poor or with some other convenient excuse like she needed money to buy *puja* material like *kumkum*, camphor and saffron. Often she would accept money from people for arranging to meet him and then she used to order him to get up and meet them. Once, a devotee gave two *pedhas* directly to Swami Samarth instead of going through Sunderabai. The same devotee earlier had refused to give her money. Sunderabai became so angry that she caught Swami Samarth by the throat and ordered him not to eat the *pedhas*. Swami Samarth remarked to Cholappa, “Cholya, the xxxx has become too much arrogant.”

Swami Samarth knew about all this but he used to say that she acts like a scarecrow to keep undesirable people away. Swami Samarth used to do whatever she asked him to do. He even defended her sometimes when quarrel arose with other servers.

Sometime later she permitted Balappa, a staunch devotee and later successor of Swami Samarth to share some of the services like heating water, cooking etc. which he did earnestly. Sunderabai became unpopular because of her scheming activities and complaints were lodged. Ultimately the Collector ordered her removal and replaced her by a committee. Mr. Barve who was supposed to have executed the order was hesitating to execute it being under the impression that she was a protégée of Swami Samarth but Swami Samarth asked him, “Is this the way you do your duties?” Mr. Barve understood the hint, arrested her, confiscated all the things she had swindled and auctioned them. Thus the long rule of Sunderabai ended.

It must have been her good karmas of earlier lives which gave her the rare opportunity to serve Swami Samarth and due to which Swami Samarth tolerated her actions for a pretty long time. But it was the greed which brought her downfall.

The committee appointed four servers for taking care of Swami Samarth. One of them was Balappa. Though they were now paid positions all refused to accept payment for the services. For them the service itself was a privilege.

24.0 MUSLIM DEVOTEES

We have already seen the case of the Muslim individual from Mangalwedhe spiritually blessed by Swami Samarth. Another Muslim individual who was a Jamadar (Seargent) in the Akkalkot police force person became a disciple of Swami Samarth about which we shall read in the next part: **Disciples of Swami Samarth.**

The following story that happened in 1874 about one Sayyad from Hyderabad is quite amazing.

Swami Samarth was sitting in the Deshmukh house one afternoon in the month of Bhadrapada (sixth month). Vamanbuwa was tuning his *veena* preparatory to giving a discourse. The *sevekaris* were sitting around waiting. Just then Sayyad arrived from Hyderabad for having his *darshan of* Swami Samarth. He asked the people near the door where Akkalkot Swami was. On hearing this Swami Samarth said, "Swami is sitting on XXXX. Swami is in Akkalkot. Go, why are you looking for him here?" (Swami Samarth often used street language.) Hearing this Sayyad stood stiffened for a few moments. He lost his consciousness and remained in a trance for some time. After some time he slowly opened his eyes and tears of love started flowing from his eyes. He made obeisance in the Muslim fashion and in a choked voice he said, "Oh Swami Maharaj, protector of the poor, you are God. I know my religion well and have read Koran and many religious books. For many years I have been striving hard in religious practices but unfortunately I did not experience anything until now. Today, as soon as I saw Maharaj I felt the waves of compassion and saw Maharaj inside my mind. Now my life is fulfilled. I am your servant! Order me to do whatever you want." He then gave the offerings he had brought with him and after staying in Akkalkot for a few days in the service of Swami Samarth he took leave and returned happily to his home.

When Swami Samarth said Swami is in Akkalkot he must have meant swami is in the mind for, "akkal" in Marathi means mind, intellect or commonsense. Akkalkot is also often referred to as Pradnyapuri by pundits, "pradnya" meaning intelligence and "puri" meaning town..

25.0 EUROPEAN ASPIRANTS

Even at the height of British supremacy and arrogance British people did come to Swami Samarth and other saints. We already saw how the collector who was the superior of Deo Mamaledar held him in high regard.

European engineer blessed Once a European engineer in railways at Solapur came to meet Swami Samarth. As soon as Swami Samarth saw him he said in Hindi, "You want a son is it not? You will get it within a year." The engineer had really come with the desire of a son in mind. He was surprised that Swami Samarth had knew it and happy that he had given his blessings. He humbly kept his head on the feet of Swami Samarth in obeisance, something unheard of in those days and returned to Solapur. Within a year he got a son as told by Swami Samarth and he became his ardent devotee.

The first photograph The honour of taking the first photograph of Swami Samarth goes to the Kodak Company. It is believed this was taken around 1857 and a bright aura is seen around the face.

Those were the early days of photography. In India it was quite new and highly expensive. Only royalties could afford being photographed. Kodak Company wanted to increase their business by photographing some great personality by way of advertisement. They decided that Swami Samarth would be a good choice because at that time Swami Samarth's fame had spread and stories about him used to be pub-

lished in Mumbai newspapers. Even the British Government in Mumbai had ordered Akkalkot king to take proper care of Swami Samarth. Accordingly Kodak Company sent their best photographer with all the paraphernalia to Akkalkot for photographing Swami Samarth. The photographer was a European.

On reaching Akkalkot the photographer contacted some devotees and expressed his intention of photographing Swami Samarth. But they told him to ask Swami Samarth himself. He did that but Swami Samarth did not agree. The photographer now felt challenged and decided to photograph Swami Samarth at any cost. He then arranged his camera and tripod at some distance from where Swami Samarth was sitting under a large tree and waited for a favourable pose. But whenever there was a proper pose and he put his head under the black cloth for inserting the photographic plate, Swami Samarth would turn his back or somebody would come in between. After this happened a dozen times the photographer was quite frustrated. He then removed the camera from there and hid it behind a bush. After some time he was successful in taking a photograph. Overjoyed at having “defeated” Swami Samarth at his game he went and developed the plate, took a print and went to Swami Samarth asking his opinion about it. Swami Samarth without looking tossed it at one of the servers who looked at it exclaimed, “What a wonderful photograph of Shri Rama!” Swami Samarth then took the photo and gave it to another server who looked at it and exclaimed that he had seen for the first time such a beautiful picture of Ambabai. Swami Samarth then showed the photograph to others but nobody said that the photograph was that of Swami Samarth. Finally the photographer said, "Maharaj, the photograph is yours." Swami Samarth exclaimed, "What? Is this my picture?" and gave the picture back to photographer who when he looked at it found it to be that of a monkey. Now everybody began making fun of him.

The photographer now realized his mistake in taking the photograph without Swami Samarth's permission. He begged his pardon and said, “Maharaj, in order that your picture should be in every house and because our business also should get the backing of such a great personality as yourself we need a beautiful picture of yours. Kindly give me permission.”

Once the photographer showed his repentance and requested humbly for permission Swami Samarth was no longer displeased. He said OK and allowed him to take his photograph.

In later years also photographs would come out properly only if Swami Samarth consented otherwise they would be just black. Once, a photographer by name Phadke who wanted to photograph Swami Samarth came to Akkalkot. He was asked by Swami Samarth to come at five in the evening. Phadke came at five but Swami Samarth, instead of sitting for the photograph gave his *Hukka* to him to hold and continued smoking up to seven o’clock when it was quite dark. Then he asked Phadke to take his photograph. When Phadke told him it was too dark Swami Samarth laughed and asked him to go and develop the photographic plate. And the surprising this is that even when photograph was not taken the plate showed a beautiful photograph.

26.0 SAMADHI

Swami Samarth took samadhi on the 30th April 1878. It was a Tuesday and the thirteenth day of Chaitra dark fortnight. Swami Samarth had been giving hints of his leaving the body since about a year earlier. Once he asked Balappa, “I have to go very high. Will you come with me to serve me permanently?” Balappa was shocked and in reply only bowed to him. After Cholappa's death Swami Samarth had begun thinking of his own samadhi. He also started showing other indications of his departure through bad omens such as overturning the Arati lamp. Sometime later he stopped sleeping on his cot and ordered it to be tied to the tree.

A few days earlier to the samadhi he went and stayed for a few days in a Math called Jangam's Math belonging to the Lingayat community. This community worships Shivalinga as symbol of Shiva. Their priest is called a Jangam. There is a large Shivlinga in the Math. On the fourth day he asked Bavadekar Puranik and other servers to bring some five hundred dry cow-dung cakes and piling them on the Shivlinga set them on fire. He poured five kilograms of ghee, five kilograms of sugar, dry dates, rice, fruits, garlands etc. as

used in a *Homa* (*Havan*) ritual (fire sacrifice). The Lingayat community made a lot of hue and cry fearing that the Shivlinga would be cracked and marched to Swami Samarth in protest but his effulgent personality restrained them. Next morning he ordered the ashes to be removed from the Shivlinga. When this was done and the Shivalinga was washed with lots of water everyone was surprised to find that it was brighter than before.

Some days later Swami Samarth came to the house of one Tatya Subhedar followed by his disciples. There was a heavy stone pot lying nearby which he ordered to be thrown into the lake near the Murlidhar temple. While the pot was being thrown in Swami Samarth himself went into the lake in knee-deep water. As soon as the pot was thrown in and sank he started saying, “Cry, people! Shout people!”

A week earlier to samadhi he started singing a *bhajan* of Lord Shiva which the servers heard from him for the first time. While he was at Subhedar's house he got an attack of diarrhea but next day he felt better and decided to go to a place called Naganhalli. He was taken there in a palanquin. He rested there for four days but again his condition started deteriorating. He then came back to Akkalkot and rested under his favourite banyan tree. Again on the fated Tuesday his condition deteriorated but his daily routines like bath etc. went on as usual. He had already stopped eating, which worried his attendants but nobody dared tell him to eat. Finally they called Sunderabai who somehow managed to feed him two spoonfuls of rice water. She asked when he will be all right. He replied that he now has to enter the stones. Others also got similar answers. His attendants then stood round him and asked with wet eyes, “Maharaj, what should we do in future?” Swami Samarth asked Shripadbhat, son-in-law of Cholappa to dig the roots of the banyan tree. To Ganpatrao, a server, he asked to remain in the temple. To Balappa he asked to sit in the shadow of the oudumber tree. To others he told that they should behave as their elders were behaving. Then he recited the twenty-second Shloka from the ninth chapter of Gita.

But as for men who worship Me,
Thinking of Me alone and none other,
To them ever absorbed in Me,
I grant Yoga and eternal happiness.

The attending devotees asked Swami Samarth about any rituals he would like to be performed. He instructed that *abhisheka* (continuous pouring of water or sometimes milk) should be done on the Shivalinga near the well. Swami Samarth used to keep a cow. The cow and its calf used to be tied at Cholappa's house. He asked them to be brought to him. Somebody went there and set the cow free. The miraculous thing that happened was that the cow came by herself straight to Swami Samarth and circumambulated (*pradakshina*) him. She then ate the food set for her and went back to Cholappa's house. He asked whether Saturn was in Pisces and informing that his moon sign (*Rashi*) was Pisces.

The day before samadhi he called for his shawl and asked it to be washed in the well and then gave it to a *shastri* named Ramshastri Avadhani.

The Mamaledar Mr. Baburao Moghe asked Swami Samarth what he should do with the things left behind and whether anything should be given to any particular person. He was told that not even a rag or loincloth belongs to him then how can he give anything to anybody?

Some months earlier Swami Samarth had asked his bed and other possessions to be burnt in a dry well at a place called Shahaganj and finally he had removed his loincloth and burnt it in the well. But the servers managed to salvage some belongings off Swami Samarth without his knowledge.

Mr. Moghe had been urging Swami Samarth that it was cold under the banyan tree and he should go inside the house. But Swami Samarth refused to go saying that in future he has to live only under the tree.

Swami Samarth was conscious and talking normally up to the last moment. Respecting everybody's wish he took some liquid rice. The servers dried his face with a cloth. He even ate the *betelnut* given by Balappa. Smile always adorned his face. Then he asked Shripadbhat to make him sit up from the lying position.

After this was done Swami Samarth sat in Lotus posture (*Padmasan*) and in a moment he left his body permanently at five-thirty in the evening. Everybody burst into tears and started crying, “Maharaj! Maharaj!” The news spread and everybody in the town rushed to have a last look at Swami Samarth.

People controlled their grief after sometime. It was now necessary to make further arrangements. The earlier plan was to make the samadhi structure under the banyan tree where Swami Samarth had left his body. But a very senior officer of Akkalkot administration who had a liking for Cholappa decided to make the structure near Cholappa’s house. According to the changed plans an “Aeroplane" was fabricated and the body of Swami Samarth was laid in it on a bed of flowers. Musicians came with their *shehnai*, drums etc. and started playing them. After the rituals of *puja*, *arati* etc. as befitted the passing away of a great yogi were over, the "aeroplane" was brought out in procession and was taken to Cholappa's house where the place for the samadhi had already been prepared. The chief administrator Nanasaheb Barve and the Mamaledar Mr. Baburao Moghe kept the body of Swami Samarth in the place marked for the samadhi. Swami Samarth was still in the *Padmasana* position as the bodies of yogis are kept. The smile was still there on his face. The door of the samadhi was then closed.

27.0 AFTER SAMADHI

Swami Samarth may have left his body but his work of helping devotees continues. Everywhere you will find people who will vouch that their desires were fulfilled and their problems solved when they prayed to Swami Samarth. There are cases when Swami Samarth initiated disciples through dreams. There are also occasions when he actually appeared in person and gave his *Padukas* for worship. A well documented instance by Dr. V. M. Bhat mentions the following incident in his book in Marathi "Yogasiddhi and Ishwarsakshatkar" (also published in English by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. But the following is based on the Marathi version.)

Dr. Bhat developed heart ailment in 1944 and around this time he had a vision of Swami Samarth in his dream. He was saved from the heart attack and for the next eight years he enjoyed good health. In 1952 he again had heart problem and he settled in Pune after retiring from his profession. During that year he suffered chest pains eight times. One day, Dr. Godbole, Professor of Geology in the College of Engineering, Pune, an acquaintance, came to him one afternoon. He was a devotee of Padgaonkar Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Samarth. He asked Dr. Bhat whether he had heart trouble. There was no reason why Prof. Godbole should have known about it. Dr. Bhat answered in the affirmative. He then asked what the relation between him and Swami Samarth was. Dr. Bhat replied that their only contact was in a dream. Prof. Godbole then wondered why Swami Samarth should have been worrying about him. He then explained that the previous night Swami Samarth had appeared in his dream and told him that Bhat was having heart trouble and that he should tell him to read *Lalitastotra*. He had therefore found out his address and had come to give him the message. Dr. Bhat was astounded because he had never rendered any service to Swami Samarth and could see no reason why Swami Samarth should have bothered about him. Prof. Godbole left saying that it was left to Dr. Bhat whether to read the *Lalitastotra* or not and that he would get the book automatically. And he did get the book automatically without searching for it and his heart problems were ameliorated.

A large number of anecdotes of personal experiences of people who prayed to Swami Samarth in their time of difficulty and had their problems solved are published in magazines like "Akkalkot Swami Darshan" and one is amazed at the compassion continued to be shown even more than a century after the samadhi.

28.0 PERSONALITY OF SWAMI SAMARTH

Except for those to whom Swami Samarth has appeared in dreams or visions most of us know his personality only through photographs, paintings and biographical books. The sharp eyes which look through you, the amused smile which is a mixture of kindness and of humour, the huge frame, the brightness

which envelops the whole photograph or picture, all these have no parallel. Following description of his appearance has been given by Mr. Belsare:

Swami Samarth was more than six feet tall, with large stomach, broad shoulders and hands reaching below the knees like Arjuna. His skin was wheat complexioned, reddish and bright. He had large ears and the lobes used to move with his every movement. His face was broad with straight nose and large forehead. His eyebrows were white. His body appeared to be delicate like a rose, and had the marks of age but his enthusiasm was better than a youth's."

He used to be in a state of "*Pishacchavritti*" which has no exact English equivalent but can be broadly described as that of a deranged or a possessed person. The daily routine of a sanyasi is generally to get up early and perform the spiritual routine like Japa, Dhyan etc., but Swami Samarth did not do anything like that. His routines like bath, meals etc. were completely handled by his servers. They too could make him do these only if he so desired. Sometimes he would take bath twice in a day and sometimes did not bother about it for a week. He used to go where it pleased him, be it a cremation ground or the royal palace. His mood could change suddenly and it was a real test for the perseverance of the people who served him. He would remain in playful or angry mood for days at a time.

Swami Samarth never observed the rules of touchability or purity prevalent at that time. In fact he tried his best to remove such ideas from devotees' minds as can be seen from a few incidences. E.g. Balappa was made to drink water from a house under mourning period and the two devotees from Bombay, Govindji and the Kanauji Brahmin were made to offer food to a Muslim fakir and the dog and eat the remains. (See next Part V-B). Swami Samarth used to become angry if anybody and especially hypocrites raised these issues and punish them by not eating with them or refusing to accept their food. He also was against any orthodox preaching. He used to quote from Vedas and also from compositions in Hindi and Marathi.

Once, while Swami Samarth was at a nearby village Naldurg a Puranic gave a discourse in which he stressed the necessity for having a son. He stressed that it is a son that gives access to heaven and without a son there is no future after death. Swami Samarth became angry for preaching this and questioned him whether the great people like Narada, Vyasa, Vamadeva had sons. He also asked whether the Puranic himself had a son. If a son can give *moksha* to his father then even dogs and pigs would achieve *moksha*. On the other hand the sins which a father has to commit to support up the son would actually go to hell. The Puranic of course surrendered to Swami Samarth and later had a son too.

Unfortunately, the traditions run deep. In spite of these teachings even great disciples like Vamanbuva Vamorikar continued their preaching of the orthodox practice of untouchability and the caste restrictions as can be seen from his Guruleelamrit which is full of such orthodox teachings. For example, Vamanbuva says in the twenty-second chapter (ovi 53 onwards) Guru should not be of another caste and should be learned in the Vedas etc., generally implying that he should be a Brahmin. In this he forgot that Tukaram, a Vaishya was a guru of Rameshwar who was a Brahmin. A good number of disciples of Swami Samarth (e.g. Swamisut and Ananda Bharati) were not Brahmins. In fact one need not belong to any particular caste to be devotee. As said in Dnyaneshwari, "Once a seeker's mind is filled with devotion to Me then his earlier life history is erased. As long as a person does not attain Me there are differences like Kshatriya, Vaishya, woman, Shudra, untouchable etc. But once they attain Me completely all these differences of caste and gender vanish. (9:456-461)"

His kindness extended even to trees and inanimate things, a sign of a person who sees Brahman in everything. He used to caress trees and stones and ask them what they wanted.

More than a thousand persons used to visit him daily. He could read other's thoughts and often used to answer questions even before they were asked. He used to speak in broken Hindi or Marathi and what he said had to be interpreted by the servers who had acquired that skill. His visitors included people from all

religions. He was as much drawn to Muslims as to Hindus. He often used to visit the Pirs and Dargas (tombs of Muslim saints) and stay there for a long time.

Spiritually charged gown I should narrate a personal experience of mine: Some years ago a gown worn by Swami Samarth had come for repairs to my friend Mr Zankar. Mr Zankar is in tailoring business and used to look after the dresses used at the Shankar Maharaj Samadhi in Pune. Mr Zankar gave me the folded dress for me to hold in my hands. The gown was huge, with a circumference of 72 inches indicating what a huge person Swami Samarth was. My pleasant experience which I can never forget was that as soon as I held the ochre coloured gown in my hands my eyes became heavy and started closing. I nearly went into a trance from which it was difficult to come out. It was amazing to note that this power had continued to remain in the gown even more than a century later. I cannot even imagine what the visitors must have felt when Swami Samarth was in his body and touched them.

29.0 HIS ADVICE

- There should be no doubts in devotion. God is hungry for your love and devotion.
- One should not even glance at the face of a lazy person. Everyone should work hard and earn his living. God helps those who go on trying.
- One should sincerely do ones duties and remember Swami Samarth.
- It is preferable to be devoted to a Guru than worship stone idols.
- Before bragging about one's learning one should examine how pure one's heart is.
- Also instead of observing outward cleanliness to an extreme be devoted with pure mind.
- To attain liberation do actions without desire for fruits.
- Be shameless when you are Guru's company. Never think that any work given by Guru is small and unimportant.
- Make every moment in life useful without wasting your time.
- He who is righteous wins.
- A *sadhu* is one by seeing whom one's sins are washed and one acquires merit.
- The *karmas* one is born with must be annulled only by experiencing their effects.

  Swami Samarth spread spirituality network through his disciples about whom we shall read in the next chapter. His biography would remain incomplete without the account of these disciples.

About Akkalkot Akkalkot is located very near Solapur which is about 5 hours road journey from Pune and about 8-9 hrs from Mumbai. There are regular buses to Solapur and Akkalkot from many major towns in Maharashtra. Solapur is a major railway station on Mumbai-Pune-Chennai route. Main temple is at the Banyan tree where Swami Samarth used to sit. There is Dharamshala (Place for pilgrims to stay and some minor hotels. Free meals are given to all pilgrims as *Prasad* in the afternoon every day. Cholappa Math where the body of Swami Samarth rests is in the town slightly away from the temple. It is managed by the descendants of Cholappa who live in the adjacent house. Many of the articles e.g. the large vessel in which water for Swami’s bath used to be heated may be seen in the house. The well from which water used to be drawn also is still there in use. One can perform puja, abhisheka etc. here under the priesthood of the descendents who are very hospitable. There are other *maths* there e.g. Balappa math.

Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.

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PART IV

DISCIPLES OF SHRI SWAMI SAMARTH

Swami Samarth had many disciples. They came from all strata of the society and some were not even Hindus. This is typical of Dattatreya tradition (and also Nath Sect), for many Muslims do worship Shri Dattatreya even if such worship is against their religion. In fact a few of them revere many other deities too. Perhaps it is only Christians that do not take any cognizance of the traditional Indian deities.

A chosen few of the disciples were given Padukas and were instructed to establish Maths from where they were to continue spiritual work and help people. Among the well-known disciples were Cholappa, Balappa, Shri Deo Mamaledar (Nasik), Shri Sitaram Maharaj (Mangalwedhe), Rangolibuva (Malwan), Shri Anandanath Maharaj (Vengurla), Shri Nanaji Rekhi (Nagar), Shri Krishna Saraswati of Kumbhargalli at Kolhapur, Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi, Swamisut and his brother Sachitanand Swamikumar (Mumbai), Vamanbuva Vamorikar (Baroda), Gopalbuva Kelkar (Chiplun), Shri Shankar Maharaj (Pune), Ramanand Bidkar (Pune), the Muslim Jamadar of Maindargi and many more. Readers have already read about Cholappa in the earlier chapter. In this chapter we shall see the biographies of some prominent disciples of Swami Samarth.

1.0 BALAPPA

Balappa hailed from Haveri in Dharwad district in north Karnataka. He was a Brahmin by caste but a jeweller and moneylender by profession which made him a millionaire. With all the wealth at his disposal however he suddenly developed a detachment for worldly things and left his home in search of a Guru at the age of thirty. A few days later he reached Ganagapur where Nirgun (attributeless) Padukas of Shri Narasimha Saraswati have been installed.

At Ganagapur Balappa utilized his time very ardently in spiritual rituals (*Anushthan*) and worshipped the Padukas surviving on alms. After two months of such austere practice he had a dream in which a Brahmin came and instructed him to go to Akkalkot and serve Shri Swami Samarth. At the same time he also found a note under his pillow telling him not to hurry. His attitude towards the world slowly changed and he began to see God in everything. One day he saw a scorpion under his dress but due to his changed outlook he let the dangerous creature go unharmed. The same night Swami Samarth came in his dream in *digambar* (without clothes) state. Next day when he had gone for alms he received good food from everybody. Taking this to be a good omen Balappa left for Akkalkot and arrived there on Ramnavami (Rama's birthday) day. Purchasing a little candy sugar as an offering he went in search of Swami Samarth and found him in the royal garden. Seeing the same form he had seen in the dream he ran to Swami Samarth and grasped his feet. Swami Samarth was also so happy by this meeting with his new disciple that he began embracing the trees nearby. People realized that Balappa was some special person.

Balappa camped himself in the Muralidhar temple in Akkalkot. He used to meet Swami Samarth daily. Now, it was Swami Samarth's custom to give part of the offerings given him by the devotees as *prasad* to everybody but he never gave any of it to Balappa, much to his chagrin. Balappa did not know at that time that Swami Samarth never gave *prasad* to those whom he retained in his service.

Some days later Balappa started bleeding from his navel and a small piece of poison came out. Somebody had poisoned Balappa three years earlier through food but due to powers of Swami Samarth nothing had happened to him during all these years and now once more with his grace Balappa was rid of the poison.

At this time all the arrangements for serving Swami Samarth were in the hands of Sunderabai. Balappa managed to get an opportunity to serve Swami Samarth through her. Initially she gave him the menial task of cleaning the spittoon and the wash bowl, a task which Balappa performed happily. But Swami Samarth still would not give him *prasad*. Finally one day Swami Samarth took out a piece of candy sugar from his mouth and gave it to Balappa. Afraid that Swami Samarth would take it back Balappa ate it quickly and Swami Samarth had a good laugh at Balappa's action.

Balappa used to be very much obsessed about cleanliness, untouchability etc., exactly opposite to what Swami Samarth used to be. To cure him of this Swami Samarth asked him one day to bring water from a house which was temporarily considered as impure due to a death in the family. Swami Samarth used to treat Balappa with great respect. Only once did he slap him hard on his back when he had bent for making his obeisance but that was instrumental in clearing all the doubts in Balappa's mind and his *sadhana* became steady. Swami Samarth intended to make him his successor.

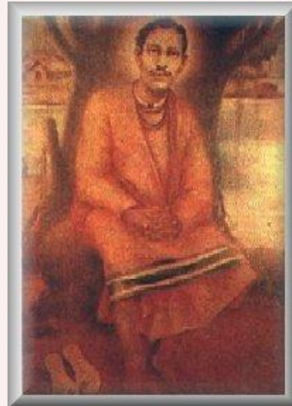
Other servers, especially Sunderabai became very jealous of the affection shown by Swami Samarth towards Balappa and started to give him trouble. The jealousy went to such an extent that Balappa began thinking of leaving Akkalkot. But Swami Samarth prevented him giving Balappa a seat asking him in a dream to move to a Maruti temple for practicing a special mantra. Now Balappa spent almost all his time in this exercise. After this was over Balappa again went to serve Swami Samarth. In order that he should be awake when Swami Samarth woke up he used to tie his own *shikha* (hair-tuft) to that of Swami Samarth before going to sleep.

Some days before leaving the body, Swami Samarth called Balappa and put his ring engraved with letters "Swami Samarth" in his finger, kept his blessing hand on his head and said, "I am now giving you my seal. Make use of it as long as sun and moon exist." He also put the *rudraksha* bead from his own neck in Balappa's and also put his own clothes on Balappa's body. He gave a banner and his personal Padukas and asked Balappa to install them in a Math. Finally Swami Samarth said, "Sit in the shadow of the oudumber tree."

Balappa did as he was told. He built a Math and installed the Padukas therein. It is now known as Balappa Math. He lived for thirty-two years after Swami Samarth took samadhi.

2.0 SWAMISUT

The spiritual life of Swamisut (literally it means son of Swami) is unparalleled in terms of love and sacrifice. His real name was Haribhau Tawade and was Maratha by caste. He had eight brothers and four sisters. Originally from a place called Itia in Ratnagiri district in Konkan region of Maharashtra, Haribhau



came to Mumbai at the age of eight for his education. He studied English and got a job in Bombay Municipality. Four or five years later certain events brought him into contact with Swami Samarth. What changed his life completely was when Swami Samarth told him "You are my son."

There was a rich pious person in Mumbai by name Madhavji Govindji who went on a pilgrimage. He took a Kanauji Brahmin with him for assistance during the travels. In due course they reached Ganagapur where they served Shri Dattatreya through fasting and worship. One day he was instructed in a dream by Shri Dattatreya that his avatar was at Akkalkot and his desires would be fulfilled there. Govindji then went with the Kanauji Brahmin to Akkalkot where both began to serve Swami Samarth. The Brahmin would cook food and both would make an offering of it to Swami Samarth daily. One day, when they came with the offering of food, Swami Samarth said loudly in Hindi (he used to speak very often in Hindi), "Go. There is a fakir and his dog in the mosque on the outskirts of the town. Feed the food to them."

Both took the food to the mosque as instructed and returned to Swami Samarth with some uneaten food consisting of *Vada* and *Kheer*. Swami Samarth instructed the two to eat the food. Govindji had hesitation in his mind since, according to the tradition of those times the food, having been touched by a non-Hindu fakir was considered as impure. He did not eat it but the Kanauji Brahmin did so piously. Swami Samarth was angry at Govindji and told him that his devotion was not yet perfect. He gave him *Padukas* and asked him to worship them. But to the Kanauji Brahmin he said, "Go. You will get ten thousand rupees in Mumbai."

Govindji returned to Mumbai and did as he was instructed. But the Brahmin was now obsessed with the ten thousand rupees mentioned by Swami Samarth. He would go and pick papers thrown around examining to see whether they were currency notes. One morning he was called by a rich widow from a bungalow and was handed over a bundle of notes worth ten thousand rupees. She was the widow of a rich Bhatia businessman who had recently died. She had decided to give an amount of Rupees ten thousand as secret charity to the first Brahmin she would meet that morning. The Kanauji Brahmin was the lucky person whom she met first that morning and thus the blessings of Swami Samarth yielded fruits.

Now, this miraculous story came to the ears of a priest named Lakshman Pandit who was in the service of Govindji. Lakshman Pandit had indulged in some trade which caused losses which led to some outstanding loans. He prayed to Swami Samarth saying that if the loans were met within a week he would visit Akkalkot immediately and meet Swami Samarth. Now it so happened that Haribhau and his friend Gajanan Khatri had also suffered a loss in some speculative business and were burdened with loans. They came for help to Pandit who agreed to undertake the payment. Now Pandit was in more trouble but miraculously due to some changes in market conditions Pandit made a profit of two thousand rupees and settled his loans. As per the vow he had made he planned to go to Akkalkot. He told both Haribhau and Khatri about it and they also felt a strong desire to meet Swami Samarth. All three took a vow that unless they met Swami Samarth they would not eat and so they came to Akkalkot.

When they reached Akkalkot Swami Samarth was in the royal palace. He just had his meals and was lying down on the bed. Cholappa's son-in-law came out of the palace to see if there were any people desirous of meeting Swami Samarth and seeing these three took them in. On the way they met Cholappa who was returning with the dish from which Swami Samarth had eaten and there was still some uneaten food left in it. Haribhau requested that if the food was left by Swami Samarth he would like to eat it. Seeing his devotion Cholappa gave the food to Haribhau who ate it with joy and they resumed their walk towards where Swami Samarth was resting. When he saw Swami Samarth his inner emotions surged up.

As soon as they came to Swami Samarth he said in Hindi, “Business was done and there was a loss. They prayed and there was a profit. ** ** ** **." The three realized the mind reading power of Swami Samarth.

During the next visit Swami Samarth looked at Pandit and said, “You tie a turban on your head." To Khatri he said, “Go to market and tie a dhoti on your head." But as regards Haribhau he pulled him near and said, "Leave your family and become my son. And bring white-white to me." After asking Swami Samarth

what the "white-white" was he understood it to be *Padukas* made of silver. Next day he prepared the dishes of Swami Samarth's liking and made its offering to him. The three then returned to Mumbai.

Haribhau suddenly developed a dislike for worldly life. The image of Swami Samarth continuously occupied his mind. He got silver *Padukas* made and came with them to Akkalkot. After keeping his head on Swami Samarth's feet he gave the *padukas* to him. Swami Samarth wore the *padukas* continuously for fourteen days. Other servers tried a lot to take possession of the padukas but Swami Samarth did not part with them saying they were his personal *linga*. On the fifteenth day he called Haribhau, held his hand and said, "Leave your service, business and become my son and building a fort near the sea raise my banner." He then asked Haribhau to do three push-ups and touching all parts of his body with the *padukas* asked him to install them in the fort (meaning a Math.)

A strange incident had occurred a few days earlier. At midnight when everybody was asleep Swami Samarth suddenly got up and taking a stick went to a tree and said loudly, "Get out from here. My Balagovind (Little Krishna or Hari) is sleeping below." When he repeated it three times, the tree shook and a bright ball of light left the tree. A little later Haribhau woke up, went to Swami Samarth and started massaging his feet. For a long time they were talking confidentially. Later Swami Samarth took some clothes including a gown from near his pillow and gave them to Haribhau saying, "Get your family possessions looted." With a happy mind Haribhau returned next day to Mumbai wearing ochre clothes and clasping the padukas to his bosom.

Once in Mumbai he gave away all his possessions. He sold the 84 *tolas* of gold (nearly 900 gms) he possessed and donated the money in charity to Brahmins. He sold even the golden bead in his wife the sacred *Mangalsutra*, the sign of marriage and a living husband worn by Hindu women. His wife cried and cried but Haribhau, now called *Swamisut* did as he was instructed by his Guru Swami Samarth.

Haribhau's only possessions now were a white sari for his wife and a gown for himself and of course the priceless padukas. He established a Math in Kamathipura in Mumbai and was completely engrossed in singing praises of Swami Samarth. He sang well and with feelings and often forgot himself while doing it. His singing used to attract large crowds. People of all castes came to him and their number increased enormously. In 1871 he started celebrating the birthday (manifestation day) of Swami Samarth on the day after Gudi Padwa (Hindu New Year in Maharashtra). People who visited the Math now were finding that their problems were getting solved. This created and increased a sense of devotion among the people. This was the time when *Maths* were established in many other locations in Maharashtra, among them Vasai, Thane, Pune, Nagar, Ratnagiri and Chiplun.

Three or four years later, during one of the visits to Akkalkot, Swami Samarth mentioned to Swamisut that he was going to take samadhi very soon. This seemed to drain the strength out of Swamisut who could not bear the idea of Swami Samarth leaving this world earlier to himself. He returned to Mumbai in a hopeless state of mind and fell ill. Swami Samarth tried to call him back to Akkalkot and even sent messengers to bring him but he did not come. He left his body on the first day of dark fortnight of *Shravan* (fifth month). This was a great blow to the devotees who thronged to the Math at Mumbai.

Telegram was sent to Akkalkot regarding this sad event but Swami Samarth already knew about it. He fell down from the bed to the ground and sat with the head in his hands. Kakubai, mother of Swamisut was near Swami Samarth at that time. She cried and cried but Swami Samarth somehow managed to console her by telling, "I am your son. Do not cry, he has been sent to a good place."

Swami Samarth handed over the workings of the Swamisut Math at Mumbai to Babu, a younger brother of Swamisut. That another son was also going the way of the first was a blow to Kakubai who cried hoarse but Swami Samarth was adamant. He called Babu, made him sit on his lap and told him that he was no longer the son of Kakubai but his own son and named him Sacchitanand Swamikumar. In the course of time the management of the Math went to his paternal aunt in the Nalawade family. The Math was

moved to Kandewadi in Girgaon and then to Chembur, a suburb of Mumbai in 1915. It is a quiet place exuding peace.

3.0 NARASIMHA SARASWATI OF ALANDI

There used to be a yogi known as Vithalbua in Pandharpur. He had some doubts regarding yoga techniques and decided to approach Shri Swami Samarth to get them cleared.

Swami Samarth who was at that time camping in the royal palace and knew by his powers that Vithalbua was coming, asked the king to spread a deerskin amidst the passage indicating that a great yogi was coming. Vithalbua reached the palace in the afternoon. As soon as he came Swami Samarth recited a *shloka* from the Yogashastra related to the penetration of the Adnyachakra (located in between the eyebrows) by the Kundalini in the yoga technique. Vithalbua at once went into a state of samadhi which lasted for nearly two hours. While he was in this mindless state of bliss Swami Samarth glanced at him and brought him out of that state into the normal world. He then instructed him to go to Alandi. He later became a sanyasi and took the name of Narasimha Saraswati. Having settled in Alandi he was known as Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi.

Narasimha Saraswati of Alandi has been a shining light in the spiritual field. He was a learned scholar and an accomplished yogi with *Siddhis* (occult powers) at his command. He used to spend much of his time immersed in the state of bliss of samadhi.

When he came to Alandi he found that the local Brahmins were wasting their time in singing erotic *lavani* songs (which are sung during the folk theatre performances) instead of in spiritual matters. He realized that they would not listen to his advice therefore he tried a trick on them. He created sweets using his *Siddhis* and told them that if they sang *abhangs* (verses) of Saint Dnyaneshwar he would give them the sweets. The Brahmins fell for this trick and slowly came out of the habit of singing erotic songs and started singing devotional songs.

He had got fabricated a heavy chariot for carrying the idol of Vithoba (Shrikrishna) during the annual festivals. It was so heavy that even the strongest could not pull it. During one of such festivals when the strong men could not pull the chariot they came to Narasimha Saraswati. He was at that time in a state of samadhi. Half-conscious, he said, "Oh Lord, you drove my chariot in the past birth and now you are asking me to do the same for you?" Saying this he quickly came to the chariot and sat on it and now the chariot moved. This proved that Narasimha Saraswati was a reincarnation of Arjuna.

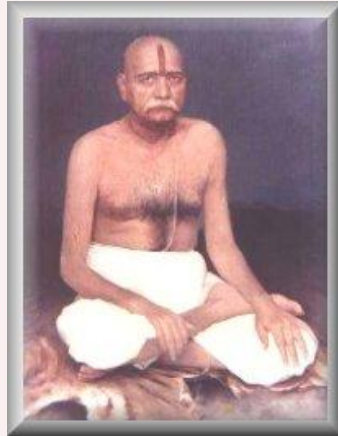
Once when he had gone to meet Swami Samarth the latter remarked to him, "You have not yet given up the “Randi”?" Randi colloquially means a prostitute and what Swami Samarth referred to was the *Siddhis* which can make a yogi go astray from his spiritual path. Narasimha Saraswati replied that efforts are going on but it will require his blessings for success.

Narasimha Saraswati lived in Alandi for about twelve years. His Math is within walking distance of the Saint Dnyaneshwar Samadhi and a lot of spiritual activities go on there.

4.0 RAMANAND BIDKAR

Ramanand Bidkar was born in a Brahmin family in 1838. His father died when he was a child. He was attracted towards spiritual path from childhood. He had performed pilgrimage of places like Pandharpur and Saptashringi in quite a young age. After marriage he started a business of jewellery and of perfumes and he became an acknowledged expert in both. Somehow he also developed an obsession for alchemy in which he is said to have succeeded. His business was successful and he became rich. But he fell into wrong company and was even involved with women. In the course of time however he started debating to himself about the choice between the temporary pleasures and permanent bliss. One day he met a Sadhu (ascetic) who remarked in presence of others that Bidkar spent his time in pleasure and would never be able to follow the spiritual path. This was a challenge to Bidkar which he accepted. He began praying

to his family deity Hanuman and performed fasts and other austerities. Very soon Hanuman instructed him in a vision to go to Akkalkot.



When Bidkar reached Akkalkot Swami Samarth was in the royal palace. The servers told him that meeting Swami Samarth was not possible. But Bidkar was determined to see Swami Samarth and vowed that he would not eat unless he saw Swami Samarth. Two nights passed and Swami Samarth sensed the longing of his devotee. He himself came to meet Bidkar by jumping over the palace wall. Bidkar at once kept his head on Swami Samarth's feet. Swami Samarth asked in Hindi why he was bowing. Bidkar replied that the foundation must be strong. Swami Samarth then pointed to the deerskin hanging on the wall. Bidkar did not clearly understand what he meant and said that he (i.e. Bidkar) was ignorant. On this Swami Samarth abused Bidkar left and right. Bidkar then came near Swami Samarth and said that he had come to the feet of Swami Samarth and now it was left to his pleasure to give guidance or not. He also added that even his abuses were like poetry to him. After some time the abuses stopped and Swami Samarth said, "Now get out of here, your work is done." Bidkar prostrated before Swami Samarth and returned to Pune. He had received initiation by Shaktipat technique in which a Guru awakens his disciple's Kundalini using his own powers. Bidkar continued his *japa* (recitation of the Mantra given by the Guru) for a year after which he again went to Akkalkot where Swami Samarth told him symbolically that matters are coming to a maturity. Next year he went to Swami Samarth with the intention of serving him for a long time.

One night Bidkar was massaging the feet of Swami Samarth. That night Swami Samarth would not ask him to stop even after it was past midnight. But Bidkar was happy at this opportunity to serve Swami Samarth. At dawn a terrible cobra came from in between the legs of Swami Samarth and raising its hood started making sounds at Bidkar but Bidkar did not get frightened. He continued massaging Swami Samarth's feet. This was really a test for the depth of sincerity for Bidkar and he passed it. Swami Samarth suddenly stood up and in mock anger said, "You are a big jinn demon." and slapped Bidkar very hard knocking him down unconscious. A disciple named Sadanand lifted Bidkar and took him to his own room. Bidkar regained consciousness next morning and now he was in a state of bliss.

When Bidkar went to meet Swami Samarth in the morning he asked, "What do I owe to you now?" He then instructed him to feed a thousand people. Bidkar returned to Pune to arrange for money. He returned to Akkalkot and gave meals to a thousand people as instructed. Swami Samarth laughed and said, "You have given me meals but what *Guru-Dakshina* are you going to give me? Will you give me plenty?" (Guru-Dakshina is the offering to the Guru given after the learning is over). Bidkar folded his hands and humbly stood before him. Swami Samarth said, "My child, you will not be able to give me Guru-Dakshina I ask. Give me your promise." Bidkar gave the promise by keeping his hand on Swami Samarth's hand. What Swami Samarth then asked was for Bidkar to stop his alchemy practice. And Bidkar did so.

Next time Bidkar went to Akkalkot he was instructed not to come to Akkalkot again and to circumambulate River Narmada. Many pilgrims undertake this task but it is an arduous and also dangerous one. Certain rules are to be observed like not to enter into more than knee-deep waters, not to go too far from the river bank and to drink plenty of Narmada water every day. It is dangerous because one has to go through thick forest and often tigers and other wild animals are encountered. Local aborigines also can loot and even kill a pilgrim.

The news that Swami Samarth had taken samadhi reached Bidkar during this pilgrimage when he was at a place called Maheshwar. He cried but the same night Swami Samarth came in his dream and told him, "I have not gone. I still live." Bidkar was immensely consoled by this.

After returning from this pilgrimage he went to many other centres of pilgrimage and on returning to Pune established his Math known as Bidkar Maharaj Math, near Omkareshwar. He passed away in 1913. He left behind many disciples, a very famous disciple being Raosaheb Sahasrabudhe who also has his samadhi in Pune.

5.0 MUSLIM JAMADAR OF MAINDARGI

There was a Jamadar (a post similar to a sergeant) in the service of the Akkalkot state whose duty was to guard prisoners. This Jamadar was a resident of the village Maindargi near Akkalkot. One day, after all the prisoners were brought back to the prison at the end of the day's work, the Jamadar found that there was one prisoner missing. The Jamadar was due to retire from service shortly and this calamity would have made him not only to lose his pension but it was also likely he would have been arrested for dereliction of duty. He started praying in his mind to Swami Samarth. Visualizing him in his mind he vowed that if the prisoner were found then he would resign from service and spend the rest of his life in the service of Swami Samarth.

Next day a horse rider, going by a trench where the prisoners were working, saw the prisoner. He caught him and handed him over to the Jamadar. During enquiry the prisoner told that he was going to run away from his hiding place in the trench but a sanyasi was threatening him whenever he attempted to do so.

When the Jamadar heard this he wept with gratitude and immediately tendered his resignation as per his vow. He was sure that the sanyasi was none other than Swami Samarth. He now remained only in the service of Swami Samarth. One day Swami Samarth threw his leather shoes at him and asked him to return to his village. The Jamadar returned to Maindargi, installed the shoes as *padukas* and began its worship with deep devotion.

Now this performance of worship is against Muslim religious customs and Jamadar was worshipping the shoes of a Hindu saint. His family and relatives opposed him and when he did not listen they threw him out of the house. But he was not deterred. He went to a deserted decrepit house and resumed his worship there. By the grace of Swami Samarth arrangements for his food also were made.

In the course of time he became well-known. People came to him from afar to get cured and to get guidance in their difficulties. He used to give them the earth from below the padukas just as ashes are given as sign of grace. People were cured and they came out of their difficulties when they applied those ashes to their bodies. People now considered him as a *Siddha* (person with occult powers) and addressed him Pirsaheb. Even Brahmins began to come to him and he was not wanting in money any more. His family took him back with honour. Later he built a temple of Swami Samarth in the village where annual festivals were observed regularly. Thus an ordinary person was raised to a high spiritual level through devotion and through the grace of Swami Samarth.

6.0 GOPALBUVA KELKAR

His full name was Gopal Ramchandra Kelkar. He came from Korle village in RajapurTaluka in Ratnagiri District in the coastal Konkan strip of Maharashtra. Born in 1847 he studied up to the third standard in Eng-

lish. It was only about thirty years after the British took over the Western part of Maharashtra and there were not many people educated in English. He easily got a job as station master in the railways. He was already married by that time. While posted in Nagpur region he developed intestinal problems and his intolerable pains would not respond to any medication. On doctor's advice he left his job and returned home but that too did not help and he felt frustrated.

Gopalbuva was an atheist as many of those who had had an English education used to be in those days. But the intolerable pains forced him to pray and make a vow that "If this universe has a God and if He makes my affliction go within eight days then I will not serve anyone other than God anymore." And within eight days his affliction really reduced. Probably these are divine ways of making people come to His inner fold.

Now that his interest in God was awakened he had to find how to serve God as he had vowed. His enquiries brought out two names, Deo Mamaledar at Nashik and Swami Samarth at Akkalkot. Deo Mamaledar was living near about where Gopalbuva's brother lived and fearing that he would be prevented from his service to God he chose to go to Akkalkot. Bluffing that he was going to visit a friend he bought a ticket not for Akkalkot but for a different station so that his real destination was not traced.

He had no money to go beyond the station for which he had purchased the ticket. He went to a *dharmashala* (caravanserai or a rest house for pilgrims) to spend the night. At midnight a rich lady came to the *dharmashala* and offered Gopalbuva a considerable sum of money but he refused saying that he needed money sufficient only to reach Akkalkot. But the lady insisted and gave him the amount so needed. When he reached Akkalkot (in 1874) only five *paise* were left in his pocket. He used it to buy dry dates as an offering to Swami Samarth and went to the Banyan tree in the royal garden where Swami Samarth was resting. He stayed in Akkalkot living on alms and saw Swami Samarth every day.

Four months passed. One night, while Gopalbuva was sleeping in the house of one Deshmukh, Swami Samarth came in his dream and passing his hand over his stomach said, "I shall cure you of your disease." When Gopalbuva woke up he went and passed a lot of urine and realized that he had now been cured. Gopalbuva wept with joy and gratitude at this demonstration of the powers of Swami Samarth.

About a month later Swami Samarth was camping at a village called Hachnal along with his servers which now included Gopalbuva. Early morning, while everybody was asleep, Gopalbuva woke up and had a strong urge to smoke a *bidi* (a cigaraette made by wrapping tobacco in a leaf) . There was nothing to light his *bidi* with so he took a piece of coir rope and held it over the oil lamp near Swami Samarth's bed. As the coir caught fire Swami Samarth sat up and Gopalbuva started shivering with fright. The coir fell from his hand. Swami Samarth stared at Gopalbuva who somehow developed courage and prayed, "Please bless this servant." Thus Gopalbuva was initiated as disciple of Swami Samarth. He continued to stay in Akkalkot and witnessed the doings of Swami Samarth, how people visited him and received his blessings. He later wrote a collection of these experiences which is one of the authentic first hand records of events at Akkalkot.

After some time Gopalbuva’s wife, having learnt that her husband was in Akkalkot came there. She served Swami Samarth for sometime after which Swami Samarth brought the husband and wife together. He then instructed Goplabuva to go to a place called Markandi near Chiplun where one Brahmacharibuva had installed the *padukas* and live there with his wife worshipping them. He also gave him two coconuts and one dry date signifying that he would get two sons and a daughter.

Gopalbuva accordingly came to Markandi which used to be on the outskirts of Chiplun in a thick forest. He did as instructed by his Guru, surviving on alms for which he used to go to town every Thursday. Finally he established a Math there. Besides the diary of collection of stories about the events at Akkalkot, Gopalbuva has written many other books. He took samadhi after staying at Markandi for forty-five years.

7.0 VAMANBUVA BRAHMACHARI

Vamanbuva Brahmachari came from a village called Bambori or Vamori in Ahmednagar district. His real name was Vamanbuva Vaidya Vamorikar. He was the son of Ravji Vamorikar and the youngest brother of Vishwanath Vaidya Vamorikar whom we have met in the previous Part IV. Both Swami Samarth and Manik Prabhu had told that Vamanbuva would rise to great spiritual heights. Since childhood itself he was devoted towards Shri Dattatreya. He was in government service for some time and later worked in a newspaper office. He used to visit many *sanyasis*, saints and fakirs for attaining peace of mind which eluded him. At some stage he and his mother moved to Pune.

He was once discussing spiritual matters with his friends when a Brahmin with bright aura appeared suddenly and said, "Everything is useless without the blessings of a true Guru." When Vamanbuva asked where he could find such a Guru the Brahmin told him to go to Akkalkot and meet Swami Samarth. He mentioned that Swami Samarth was an avatar of Shri Dattatreya. The Brahmin went away as suddenly as he had come.

Vamanbuva then went to Akkalkot *via* Solapur in 1860. In those days railway line was only up to Solapur and one had to go to Akkalkot by road, on foot or by animal driven transport. When Vamanbuva reached Akkalkot he learnt that Swami Samarth had gone to a neighbouring village called Handre and he immediately proceeded towards Handre. Swami Samarth was returning to Akkalkot at that time so Vamanbuva met him halfway itself. The first sentence Swami Samarth uttered when he saw Vamanbuva was, “You made fun of my Brahmin?" Vamanbuva then realized the powers of Swami Samarth and prostrated before him. Just then Swami Samarth said, "Serve me and you will be devoted to the Brahman. Hand over your bundle to me." Vamanbuva handed over everything he had to Swami Samarth retaining only the loincloth for his dress. Swami Samarth returned a copper vessel to him and asked him to take care of it. Now Vamanbuva became a devoted servant of Swami Samarth. He used to visit Akkalkot twice or thrice every year.

Vamanbuva once went to the temple of Saptashringi Devi at Vani near Nashik. This holy place is a power centre (Shaktipeetha) of Devi. Out of some 150 power centres of Devi in India four are located in Maharashtra. These are: Renukadevi at Mahur, Tuljabhavani at Tuljapur, Mahalakshmi at Kolhapur and Saptashringi at Vani (This latter centre is actually called half-centre). This place is of great importance to Nath Sect sanyasis whose initiation rituals are supposed to be performed here. After worship Vamanbuva requested the priests to give him the betel-leaf from Devi's mouth but they refused. Vamanbuva then prayed to her and the betel-leaf fell onto his hands which surprised the priests.

At Nasik he collected water from river Godavari and went to Pandharpur to bathe with it the Vithoba’s feet. When he was bathing the feet of the idol he saw Swami Samarth in place of Vithoba. Later when he went and met Swami Samarth, the latter said, "You made big noise at Saptashringi and I had to give you the betel leaf. And it was I who accepted the water from you at Pandharpur." He then said, "The pot is not fully baked. Why do you waste energy going here and there? Remain quietly in a state of bliss." Vamanbuva realized that Swami Samarth is the formless Brahman itself taking different forms.

In 1876 Vamanbuva who was in Baroda fell seriously ill with all sorts of afflictions like dysentery, piles, rheumatism, cough, etc. but no cure was in sight. He wrote to Swami Samarth about it praying for relief but there was no reply. In a hopeless state of mind he decided to commit suicide by jumping into the lake (Sursagar lake at Baroda) but as he was about to jump somebody caught him from behind. It was Swami Samarth who slapped him hard and said, "Where are you going without settling the account of your Karmas? And you are getting angry at me? Instead of taking natural samadhi you are committing suicide by drowning?” He then took Vamanbuva by hand and led him to his house where Vamanbuva's mother and brother had the opportunity to meet Swami Samarth. He then told Vamanbuva that he would be cured and that he should not play tricks else he would receive beating with shoes. So saying Swami Samarth vanished.

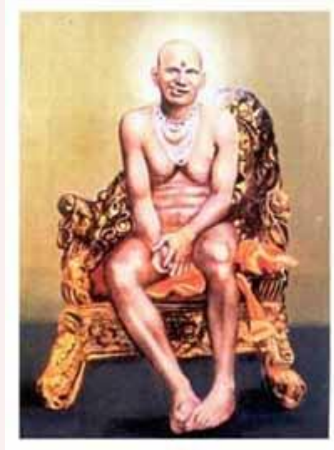
Vamanbuva has written his experiences with Swami Samarth in the well-known book Guruleelamrit. Unfortunately, Vamanbuva has preached orthodox behaviour in the book in spite of his Guru being Swami Samarth who was against it and did not care for cast or religion but only to the spirituality.

In 1901 Vamanbuva realized that the end was near and adopted *sanyasa* taking the name Adwaitanand. Same year, after arranging for the publication of Guruleelamrit he left his body with the name of Swami Samarth constantly in his mind. His samadhi along with the padukas given to him by Swami Samarth is at Baroda. (See remarks on Guruleelamrit in previous part V-A).

8.0 SHRI KRISHNA SARASWATI

Shri Krishna Saraswati was a disciple of Swami Samarth. He used to live in a Videhi state (i.e. being in body he was not aware of it). Such people are liberated even while they live. His Math is located in Kumbhar Galli (Lane) and therefore he was also known as Kumbharswami (Kumbhar means a potter).

Shri Krishna Saraswati was the son of Appabhat Joshi and Annapurna, a poor but pious couple of Nandani near Kolhapur. For many years they could not get a child. After a lot of prayers Shri Dattatreya came in Appabhat's dream and told him that a son will be born to him and that this son will be his (i.e. Shri Dattatreya's) avatar. As per the vision Shri Krishna Saraswati was born in the year 1835.



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From his horoscope astrologers had predicted that this boy would be a great spiritual person. The boy was longing for his Guru in childhood itself and one day he came to Swami Samarth. Swami Samarth recognized him at first sight and to avoid interference from those present there he took him by hand and quickly took him to the nearby forest. There Swami Samarth sat on a stone and the boy stood before him singing his praises. But Swami Samarth stopped him saying that he was part of Swami Samarth himself and his avatar was for the spiritual advancement of people. Swami Samarth kept his hand on his head which put Shri Krishna Saraswati into samadhi that lasted for a week. After seven days Swami Samarth lovingly fondled him and instructed him to go to Kolhapur and live in Balonmatta-Piscachavritti which means a state which is sometimes childlike, sometimes excited and sometimes deranged. So saying Swami Samarth brought Shri Krishna Saraswati back to Akkalkot. On the day Swami Samarth returned some devotees brought rice mixed with milk as an offering. Looking at it he asked them why they had brought it and instructed that special *laddoos* be brought. They did so and Swami Samarth gave it as *prasad* to Shri Krishna Saraswati.

Shri Krishna Saraswati stayed in Akkalkot and served Swami Samarth for many days. One day a Brahmin afflicted with leprosy, whom Swami Samarth was expecting, came. The Brahmin had come from Ganagapur where he had worshipped the Nirgun Padukas of Shri Narasimha Saraswati for a very long time in the

hope of getting cured of his affliction. One day he was told in a vision that he should go to Akkalkot where his wish would be fulfilled. When the Brahmin arrived he made obeisance to Swami Samarth with folded hands and prayed for relief. After listening to him Swami Samarth instructed him to accompany Shri Krishna Saraswati to Kolhapur and serve him for getting cured.

In Kolhapur the Brahmin began to serve Shri Krishna Saraswati as instructed. Shri Krishna Saraswati tested his sincerity in various ways and after being fully satisfied cured him. During his lifetime Shri Krishna Saraswati cured many people of their diseases by his spiritual powers. Among these were also people possessed by spirits. Through these services as well as through miracles he created faith in the Almighty in the hearts of people. He survived Swami Samarth by about twenty-two years taking samadhi in the year 1900. With the expression of a deranged idiotic person on his face he remained in permanent inner bliss and was a “Videhi” person.

9.0 SITARAM MAHARAJ

Like Shri Krishna Saraswati, Sitaram Maharaj was also a liberated *Videhi* person. He used to call himself “mad Sitaram”. His is a very strange life story. There is no record of his having an education or having worked for a living anywhere nor having touched the family life, but he was a great yogi.

He was the son of one Bapurao Subhedar who worked for his living in Satara. Sitaram’s step-mother used to torture him. Not able to tolerate it he left home at the age of twelve and came to Akkalkot where he served Swami Samarth very sincerely. Recognizing his sincerity, Swami Samarth kept his blessing hand on his head and from then onwards Sitaram progressed rapidly in yoga, becoming a *Siddha* (attaining occult powers) within six years. Swami Samarth now instructed him to go back to where he came from. Accordingly he went to Mangalwedhe. Realizing him to be a saint and an accomplished yogi people started calling him Sitaram Maharaj.

In Mangalwedhe he lived the life of a *Videhi,* always in the state of divine bliss. He used to go to any house for alms and shout, “Mother, give some bread.” He used to eat there itself whatever was given to him, drink some water and leave. He would then go and sit at the cremation ground. People who visited him found peace of mind. Sometimes he would give advice, “Always remember the name of Rama. Do not go after empty scholarship. See God in every living and non-living thing.” He lived in Mangalwedhe for forty years. Two weeks before his samadhi he was telling everybody that “Mad Sitaram will now depart.” His Samadhi is located at Khardi, about fifteen kilometres from Pandharpur.

10.0 ANANDA BHARATI

Ananda Bharati, whose name before initiation by Swami Samarth was Laxman was a fisherman by profession. He used to visit Swami Samarth often and was completely devoted to him. Once, while he was fishing, his boat was caught in a storm and he was about to get drowned. But he developed courage and prayed loudly to Swami Samarth who at that time was in Akkalkot playing dice at Cholappa’s house. Swami Samarth suddenly stopped playing and shouting repeatedly “Laxman is drowning!”, he gestured as if he was pulling somebody up. To the surprise of those present, salty sea water started dripping from his hands for several minutes.

A week later Laxman came and embraced the feet of Swami Samarth. With tears in his eyes he said, “Maharaj, you saved me or else I would have drowned. I had had enough of the worldly life. Now I am offering myself to be completely in your service alone.” He gave up all his worldly possessions and remained in the service of Swami Samarth. His samadhi is located at Thane.

11.0 ANANDANATH MAHARAJ

Anandnath Maharaj came from Walawal in south Konkan region of Maharashtra. He was from Walawalkar family that belongs to the Kudal Deshastha Brahmin community. He was a trader by profession trading in *Hirda,* a seed of medicinal value obtained in forests. He heard about Swami Samarth in Mumbai

and felt so eager to meet him that he immediately went to Akkalkot. After he reached there, while he was washing his feet in the pond under the famous banyan tree a twig of the tree fell on his head. He looked up and saw the brilliant form of Swami Samarth who kept his blessing hand on his head. That immediately made him completely detached from the worldly affairs. He stayed in Akkalkot for about six years. One day Swami Samarth took out tiny Padukas from his mouth, gave them to Anandanath and instructed him to establish his Math elsewhere. These Padukas were only about a centimetre in size and were made of metal, but their peculiarity was that in spite of their small size every line on the feet of Swami Samarth was clearly imprinted on it and nobody could tell what metal they were made of.

Anandanath Maharaj established three *Maths*, at Yevale, at Hodavade (in Sawantwadi) and at Dhawade in Vengurla. He composed many poetical compositions on Swami Samarth. He used the *Siddhis* (occult powers) attained by him to mitigate the problems of those who approached him for help. He took samadhi at Vengurla in 1903.

12.0 SHRI SHANKAR MAHARAJ

Of all the disciples of Swami Samarth Shri Shankar Maharaj stands distinctly apart in every respect. In outside appearance he was bent physically and would speak with a lisp. He used to smoke cigarettes (particularly of Honeydew brand) and drink hard liquor, especially brandy, in any amount without any physical effects. But he was a yogi of very high calibre and had all Siddhis and Tantras at his command. He was an Avaliya belonging to Nath sect and other yogis referred to him as Avadhuta.



Not much is known about his early life. Different versions about his birth are told. One story says a Shiva devotee Chimnaji of village Antapur near Nashik was instructed by Shiva himself in a dream to look for the child in the nearby jungle. The child who was named Shankar was found in the bushes by a childless couple. The child showed the signs of a yogi. After the couple had their own child Shankar went away to the Himalayas. That was Shankar Maharaj.

Another version told by Maharaj himself to his disciple Dr Dhaneshwar says that he was born in a Brahmin family named Upasani in about 1800 AD at Mangalwedhe (near Pandharpur). He used to be very naughty as a boy. One day, at the age of about seven or eight, armed with bow and arrow, he entered the forest on the banks of the river Chandrabhaga towards a place called Machnur while chasing a deer. There he encountered a large Sanyasi who prevented him from shooting the deer. During this encounter the sanyasi held and fondled him. Thus Maharaj got *sparshadiksha* or initiation as disciple by touch by the sanyasi who was none other than Swami Samarth of Akkalkot. Maharaj stayed with him for about six months during which he gave him all knowledge and instructed him to go on pilgrimage. He went to the Himalayas where he did very hard *tapas*. On returning from there he spent his time with Siddha-yogis in and around

Vriddheshwar (near Nagar) which is known as the centre for meditation of several Nath Siddhas in the past. He called himself as a belonging to the Nath panth. After the British took over Pune, he met a British collector who developed a faith in Maharaj and considered him as his Guru. He took Maharaj to England where he stayed for ten years teaching him the yoga path and returned after he reached perfection.

Another interesting piece of information has been told to the author (in 1995) by Mr. Madhusudan Kanhere, a 77 year old ascetic from Pune. He is also a disciple of Swami Samarth and also of late Shri Gulawani Maharaj. He is one of the few persons now living who had a close interaction with Shri Shankar Maharaj whom he met in 1946, about a year before his Samadhi. Shri Shankar Maharaj told Mr. Kanhere, that Swami Samarth had taught him all aspects of yoga and *tantras* and then only permitted him to travel over India and prepare disciples with due care. By that time Shri Shankar Maharaj was about seventy years old. Shri Kanhere tells that the original physical stature of Shri Shankar Maharaj was that of a more than six foot tall person with bright aura. But to keep undesirable persons away he took the form of a physically deformed person. This may be true because Maharaj has given vision in that original form to his disciple Dr. Dhaneshwar (see below) and to Mr. Kanhere himself.

Maharaj is said to have told that he was known by other names elsewhere. In Gwalior region he was known as Gourishankar and took samadhi there. He once told that he had been at Raver in Khandesh region where he was known as Kunwarswami and that his samadhi temple is at a place called Waghoda where he took samadhi in 1878. (This is the also the year when his Guru Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot also took samadhi). The puzzling thing is that Maharaj left *samadhis* in these places and appeared in body as Shankar Maharaj in Maharashtra. Yet one must also remember that he was a Siddha-yogi and such feats would not have been impossible for him though it will make a common man wonder. Maharaj himself told that he spent some time with famous singers and *Pakhavaj* (a two sided percussion instrument) players and became himself a talented singer and *Pakhavaj* player, but gave up these activities after Shri Swami Samarth told him not to waste his time in such pursuits. Shri Swami Samarth taught him various aspects of yoga and tantra system and then authorized him to have his own disciples. But chronology of these events is again lacking or confusing.

He returned to Maharashtra some time after Swami Samarth's samadhi in 1878. He went to Shubharaya Math in Solapur and stayed with Janardanbuva who became one of the main disciples of Maharaj. From there he went to Triambakeshwar near Nashik where he stayed with a pleader named Rambhau Akolkar. Rambhau had a cow which was not giving milk. By his powers Maharaj made it give milk just as Shri Narasimha Saraswati and Swami Samarth had done earlier elsewhere. From Nashik he came to Pune. We get more information about Maharaj now from his devotees who have narrated it to others or put it in writing.

In Pune he used to live with Mama Dhekane, a poor person. Later he had wealthy disciples like Raosaheb Mehendale but he continued to stay with Dhekane quite a lot. He instructed Taisaheb Mehendale, wife of Raosaheb to give discourses on Dnyaneshwari which Maharaj himself used to attend. These discourses continued for 32 years until 1972. Activities of Maharaj in Pune until Samadhi are well documented by Dnyananath or Bapu Ranade (Now *Yogi Dnyananath*), only he has recorded the samadhi date wrongly as 24th April instead of 28th. (see the biography at **http://www.shreeshankarmaharaj.com)**

His activities extended as far as Nagar, Akluj and Sangli. At Akluj he had many devotees. Among the well-known devotees were Mr. Girme a farmer and Mr. Keshavbhai Asher the Managing Director of the Malinagar Sugar Factory and Secretary to the Managing director Mr. G.K. Pradhan. Mr. Pradhan was an atheist but after seeing the miracles by Maharaj and receiving his grace that put him into deep trance and gave him divine experiences he became a staunch devotee and disciple. Mr. G. K. Pradhan wrote the two famous books: Towards the Silver Crests of Himalayas and Know Thyself in which the teachings of Maharaj are presented through the characters Gurudev and Swamiji respectively. The first book has been translated into many languages. A fourth disciple was a welder in the Sugar Factory named V. K. Kulkarni who

also used to be critical of Maharaj but later became his disciple. The details about these and other disciples may be found in the author's book "Yogiraj Shri Shankar Maharaj" at www.vvshirvaikar.de

In Nagar he had disciples in two houses. Dhaneshwar family were his devotees and so were the Abhyankar family. Dr Dhaneshwar is said to be his disciple to whom he taught all he knew. The love between Maharaj and Dr Dhaneshwar was like mother and son. Maharaj had given him *darshan* in the form of a tall fakir even while he was a boy. In Nagar Dr Dhaneshwar practiced medicine not for profit but service as per Maharaj's instructions. Once Maharaj even called Meenanath, one of the Navanaths to visit his home and bless him. In spite of all the wealth and *siddhis* offered to him Dr Dhaneshwar chose only the devotion to Maharaj. In fact it is for the sake of Dr Dhaneshwar that Maharaj postponed his samadhi by 30 years. His son Dr D. N. Dhaneshwar has written his biography in Marathi which is very interesting and educative to read for a *sadhak*. (*Siddhayogi Dr Nagesh Ramchandra Dhaneshwar* by Dr D.N.Dhaneshwar, Santkripa Prakashan., 1994.)

Major Abhyankar was a devotee of Shankar Maharaj who had saved him from bullets in the war. Bu his son Datta was dearer to him. Maharaj took him to Girnar and gave him spiritual experiences. Datta used to give his service at the samadhi in the early days when there used to be only a tin roof over the samadhi.

Maharaj used to move frequently between Pune, Nagar, Solapur, Akluj (near Solapur) and Bombay guiding and inspiring people on spiritual path. In this respect he was unlike other disciples who established a Math and remained there at one place most of the time. He is more like Shri Dattatreya who wanders and graces devotees.

Maharaj did not give any discourses himself. Due to his unusually long tongue his speech was lisped. But Maharaj loved Dnyaneshwari and asked people to read and study it. Maharaj used to drink liquor with a purpose: to keep unwanted people away. Only those people who saw Maharaj beyond the external looks could come to him. There are incidents when Maharaj drank and another person nearby got drunk. Some people to whom Maharaj gave a glass of brandy and asked them to drink it told later that it was not liquor but a nice testing sherbet or coconut water.

The life of Shri Shankar Maharaj has been full of miracles he performed to help his devotees and to turn them to spiritual path. The miracles are not different from those performed by other great yogis like Shri Narasimha Saraswati and Swami Samarth. Maharaj did these miracles to draw people to spiritual path, teach them basic philosophy of spiritual life and to benefit them even in material aspects. But he always insisted that **while Guru's grace helps, the disciple himself must work hard to get results**.

Shri Shankar Maharaj took Samadhi at the age of about 150 years, in Pune on April 28, 1947. But he is known to live in the bodies of certain chosen persons and his work thus continues even after samadhi. His samadhi, which is now virtually a temple, is situated at Padmavati in Pune beside the Pune-Satara road.

Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj

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PART IV:

FOURTH AVATAR: SHRI MANIK PRABHU



Shri Manik Prabhu (1817-1865)

Shri Manik Prabhu is considered as the fourth avatar of Shri Dattatreya. It has been mentioned earlier that devotees of Datta-Tradition are both orthodox and liberal and include many Muslims. Perhaps the largest number of Muslims may be found among the devotees of Shri Manik Prabhu, an obvious reason being the location of his activities was in the Muslim state of Hyderabad ruled then by Nizam. The Muslim rulers gave full support to Manik Prabhu and his religious activities. Another peculiarity of this avatar is that while all other avatars of Shri Dattatreya as well as the saints of Datta-Tradition are known for austerity, Shri Manik Prabhu was a *Rajayogi* (Royal yogi) and his set-up is known for its royal splendour and luxury. However Shri Manik Prabhu himself was never attached to them. He gave away all in charity but always the splendour continued.

1.0 BIRTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

There is a town called Kalyan in the erstwhile Hyderabad state under Nizam. (It now falls in Karnataka state after the states were reorganized). It was actually the capital of a mini-state under a Nawab (Muslim ruler). There used to live in this town a pious couple named Manoharpant Naik and Baiamma. Their family worshipped Khandoba (a form of Shiva) but there was also the tradition of *japa* (continued repetition) of the name of Shri Rama in his family since the days of Manoharpant's grandfather. Manoharpant's mother was a devotee of Hanuman. Manoharpant himself was an ardent devotee of Shri Dattatreya. The family was thus very religious minded.

They had three sons, Hanmant (or Dadasaheb), Manik and Narasimha (or Tatyasaheb). Before Manik was born, Manoharpant was told in a dream that the child would be an avatar of Shri Dattatreya. Manik was born in the house of Manoharpant's grandparents in the village of Ladwanti on December 22, 1817.

Though he was named Manik (meaning ruby) he was fondly called by his parents as Ratnya (meaning jewel). Manik had such a bright aura that people in the village used to come just to see him.

Manik was playful as a boy. He used to spend all his time playing with the children in the neighbourhood or going with them to the nearby woods for cattle grazing. But he never went to school. All the efforts of his elders in that direction were in vain. Because of this his people thought him to be mad and began referring to him as “Veda Bhau” meaning mad brother. Though he never went to school he could speak, read and write several languages like Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit. He also had the inborn knowledge of the Vedas and *Shastras*. Perhaps his father taught him to write at home but he could not have taught him all these languages. It is said that when the thread ceremony was performed at the age of seven for his formal entry into Brahminhood he started reciting the daily ritualistic mantras as soon as the Gayatri Mantra was whispered in his ear.

Sometimes Manik would apply ash on his body and speak on spiritual topics like an elderly person but his playing all sorts of games with children did not stop. His games included mock worship using stones for idols. He used to teach his companions lessons in spiritual life through the games. He especially did not like that animals be tortured or killed, not even scorpions. Occasionally he would remain in the woods for couple of days without trace.

Even when he was a child, he seems to have occult powers. Once the children found a dead parrot while playing. Manik took the body in his hands and fondling it threw it in the air asking the bird to fly away to its nest and it really did fly away. People discovered that what he spoke came out to be true. Because of some supernatural events people from neighbouring villages developed a faith in him and began paying him visits and give gifts and money. They began calling him Manik Prabhu (Prabhu meaning master) and later referred to him only as Prabhu.

He had a cowherd friend named Govinda. For three or four days Govinda had not joined the group for playing. Manik went to his home to call him. He found Govinda’s mother crying because Govinda was dead and they were preparing to take his body away for cremation. But Manik asked the mother not to cry and told her that Govinda was not dead but merely sleeping. He also added that if she told him aloud that Bhau has come to meet him he would wake up. She did that and Govinda really got up and went away with Manik. This news spread around like wild fire and Manik had to go in hiding for a few days to avoid the rush of people.

In the course of time Manoharpant died. A family friend named Bhalchandra Dikshit, a learned and highly respected Brahmin from a neighbouring village of Hallikheda came to Kalyan to offer condolences. When he saw Manik he realized that the boy was something special. He inquired about him to Baiamma. She complained that Manik was not interested in studies and instead went around playing the whole day and behaved eccentrically. She requested him to take Manik under his care and give him some education. Mr. Dikshit who was already attracted to the boy agreed. Manik went with him without protest. At Hallikhed also his behaviour did not change, but Mr. Dikshit left instructions to let him do what he liked. Manik was very pleased with the faith Mr. Dikshit kept in him and one day told him so. Later Narayan Dikshit, his son became one of the principal disciples of Shri Manik Prabhu. The two families became connected through matrimony: Hanmant, Manik’s elder brother, married Mr. Dikshit’s daughter. After some days Manik returned to Kalyan.

2.0 RECOGNITION AS AN AVATAR

In Kalyan everybody in the family was unhappy about Manik because his activities did not bring any income. His maternal uncle arranged a job for him at the *octroi* post (post where tax on incoming goods is collected). His job was to collect *octroi* and maintain accounts. The job went on well for some time but afterwards Manik began giving away the collections to the poor. Finally he gave up the job.

One day, when he was about sixteen years of age, his uncle scolded him for leading an idle life and asked him to leave the house. Manik left home without telling anybody and went to a village called Manthal fifty miles away. There is a holy lake called Ambilkund near the village and caves in the nearby hills where he spent his time in meditation. Occasionally he would be seen wandering in the woods. When the relatives tracked him down and met him there he told them that as promised he has taken birth unto them and remained with them until the thread ceremony. Now he has to travel and finish his duties as an avatar by gracing the devotees. They should not feel sorry for his departure. But since they were insisting he would soon come and visit them. He also advised that they should continue their service to Shri Dattatreya and assigned Tatyasaheb for carrying out the family duties. During this period villagers who now knew him to be a great yogi came to meet him in large numbers. The custom of "Butti Jatri" which in Kannada implies collective meals shared from whatever the visitors had brought started from this time onwards. Shri Manik Prabhu remained at Manthal for six months. Occasionally he went to the cave in the Manthal forest. That cave is now known as Manik Prabhu cave.

After about a year Manik Prabhu returned to Kalyan and remained at home for about five years. When people came to know he had returned they rushed to meet him and take his blessings. They brought lots of gifts which were always distributed among the poor. Programs of *bhajans, kirtans* etc. were regularly held and thus people's mind was constantly directed towards God. Manik Prabhu left home for some time to visit the holy places nearby including the temple of his family deity Khandoba where the occasion of Dattajayanti (birth of Shri Dattatreya) used to be celebrated in a big way. After returning he arranged for his younger brother Tatyasaheb's marriage. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp in which the Nawab of Kalyan also spent ten thousand rupees, (a great sum in those days) in charity and for feeding Brahmins and poor people of all communities from all around.

Now the crowd of visitors to Manik Prabhu was on the increase. Off and on Manik Prabhu would tour the surrounding regions and help people by using his occult powers. Once he went to the state of Mudhol and spent time in meditation in one of the caves in the local hills. While he was travelling in this region he revived a person who had died of snake bite. That spread his fame so much many centres for service to him were established in the region.

3.0 MANIKNAGAR

Once, a Brahmin family was coming to meet Shri Manik Prabhu. They camped in an old Shiva temple situated in the forest between Humanabad and Gadwanti. Some dacoits attacked them there. They raised their weapons to kill the family who ardently prayed to Shri Manik Prabhu. Shri Manik Prabhu suddenly appeared and froze the dacoits' hands before they could strike. The dacoits prayed and surrendered to Shri Manik Prabhu who let them go. (This story will remind of a similar story regarding Shripad Shrivallabh in Ch 11 of Gurucharitra)

From this time onwards Shri Manik Prabhu decided to make this place his permanent abode. When the government officials (not the ***secular*** government of today but the Muslim government one and half centuries ago in the Nizam era.) came to know about this they came to meet Shri Manik Prabhu, had the Shiva temple cleaned and renovated and performed Rudrabhishek ceremony in the service of Shiva. People were fed; Brahmins were given *dakshina* of one rupee each. Money was also given in charity to the poor. The place was now flooded with people coming to see Shri Manik Prabhu. He used to sit under a ***bel*** tree while the devotees took shelter under the surrounding trees or in makeshift tents. The government officials left a commissary with stock of grains and other provisions. They also provided many servants for the local arrangements. All visitors who came for relief, including the sick, were fed through this arrangement. His mother came to live with him along with the younger brother but he ordered them to return to his elder brother Dadasaheb permitting them only weekly visits either on a Thursday or on a Saturday.

Later, at the time of Dattajayanti celebrations, a *gadi* (seat of ruling) of Shri Dattatreya was established at the place. Routines of daily worship, *arati* etc. were also established. The place slowly turned into a village

and then a town and was named **Maniknagar**. Later the devotees established a *gadi* for Shri Manik Prabhu also and he began occupying it for the benefit of his devotees. The meetings held here were like a royal durbar (court) and was called Maniknagar Durbar.

The fame of Shri Manik Prabhu spread among the Muslims also. They too flocked there for offering their respects and receiving his grace. People from both Hindu and Muslim religions, afflicted with incurable diseases, people possessed by spirits, people looking for success in life and those desirous of children all flocked there and their desires were fulfilled. They offered lots of money, jewellery, clothes etc. at Shri Manik Prabhu's feet. As a result the custom of celebrating two Muslim festivals including Muharram and two Hindu festivals including Dattajayanti started. These were celebrated on a grand scale. During these festivals Shri Manik Prabhu used to distribute money to the needy. Generally nobody left without receiving something from him. In the course of time government developed the town and established gates and markets and provided security in Maniknagar.

Shri Shankaracharya of Shringeri once visited him and was welcomed and treated with honour. Another time Shri Swami Samarth came to visit him and had a private meeting (See Part V-A).

Some purist Muslims from Bedar did not like their brethren to go to Manik Prabhu. They brought obstacles but when they saw his occult powers they relented. When Shri Manik Prabhu's fame reached Nizam Nasiruddoulla he asked his minister Salarjang to bring him to him offering an estate of sixty thousand rupees annual income. Salarjang sent his Brahmin assistant Arab Yashwantrao for the job. When the latter went to the Maniknagar Durbar with the offerings including the gift deed for the estate, Shri Manik Prabhu told him, "We are a fakir. What have we to do with all these riches and the estate? Whole world is ruled by God. We see our estate wherever we cast our eyes. Tell your master that if he wants more than what he already has he can come here. Tell him also that, 'It is better for his kingdom if I continue to be where I am now.'

4.0 SAMADHI

Shri Manik Prabhu then decided to take samadhi but kept this a secret except from three or four reliable confidants instructing them that the news that he had taken samadhi should be revealed only after four days. This was necessary because the devotees, especially the Muslim devotees, would have created obstacles. He instructed that people should be permitted to visit the samadhi only four days later and Manohar (Appasaheb), the son of his younger brother Tatyasaheb be appointed to his *gadi* (seat) as successor on the sixteenth day. His elder brother and mother had already died and had received proper spiritual advice from him before they passed away.

Accordingly, in the year 1865, on the *Ekadashi* day of bright fortnight of *Margashirsha* month by Hindu calendar (Shaka year 1787) he took bath early in the morning, had himself worshipped by Appasaheb and wearing flower garlands made Appasaheb perform his *Pancharati* and gave *prasad* to those present. Putting the garland from his own neck to that of Appasaheb and blessing everybody, he sat in the previously constructed enclosure for *samadhi*. This was a critical moment for all present. They shouted in unison, "Avadhuta Chintan Shri Gurudeo Datta" and with tearful eyes put bricks and mortar to close the entrance of the enclosure. One can only imagine the kind of mood these people had in those moments when their Guru and saviour would be seen no more in his material body. As instructed, on the sixteenth day Appasaheb was appointed to the *gadi*.

5.0 VENKAMMA

Manik Prabhu had many disciples from all communities. One prime disciple was a woman named Venkamma. She was a child widow and used to visit Manik Prabhu daily when he was at a village called Mylar. When asked she told him that she had nowhere to go and she was not going to leave his feet. He told him that he was a wanderer without any possessions and if she wanted to be with him she would have to give up all the ornaments and wear ashes. She immediately removed all ornaments and offered them at his

feet. Seeing her devotion he arranged that she will be under the protection of his mother. After testing her rigorously he permitted her to be among his disciples. He never spoke to women. Women were not allowed in the Durbar unless they were accompanied by their husbands and when this was not possible they had to speak through Venkamma. When Venkamma died her Komtee community people came to claim her body but when they lifted it sounds of *Aum* started coming from the mouth. Finally on the instructions of Manik Prabhu, the final rites were performed by Brahmins. Among other disciples were Narayan Dikshit, a famous singer named Tarra Husen Khan, Bappacharya and Vithalrao Kulkarni.

6.0 SAKALMAT SAMPRADAYA

As said earlier Shri Manik Prabhu was a linguist. He was also a good orator and had a beautiful voice. His poems are well-known in the old Hyderabad region both to Hindus and Muslims. He has written a book called Kalpataru. His day of samadhi is celebrated every year and is coupled with the Dattajayanti celebrations four days later. His sect is called *Sakalmat Sampradaya* (loosely translated as the sect of universal thinking). The basic tenets of this sect are that ***if we ignore the differences due to time and geographical location, the basic principle of all religions is the same and all have considered attaining God and liberation to be the main aim. The differences do not affect equality and brotherhood.*** The sect was further expanded by Manohar Manik Prabhu. Subsequent successors were Martanda Manik Prabhu, Shri Shankar Manik Prabhu and the current Shri Sidharaj Manik Prabhu.

A Commentary

We see in Manik Prabhu a saint who was very dispassionate and detached in spite of the royal splendour he was exposed to. Everything he did was for people's benefit. Like Shripad Shrivallabha Manik Prabhu did not have any Guru nor did he take *sanyasa*. Whatever happened in his life happened as if ordained by the divine. It is really amazing that a Hindu saint was so much honoured and worshipped by Muslims and that too in a Muslim ruled state. Only other example of such tolerance is that of Janardanswami (See later parts) who served the Muslim king in Daulatabad (former Devgiri) who even made Thursday an official holiday instead of Friday as is customary in Muslim states.

Dhere (Se Bibliography) remarks that though Muslims flocked to Hindu saints like Manik Prabhu it was not because of the religion but because of their occult powers and miracles performed by them. Though Sakalmat sect was founded by Manik Prabhu, it was not a religion and it is doubtful if any Muslims joined it.

Offered at the feet of my Guru Shri Shankar Maharaj.

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